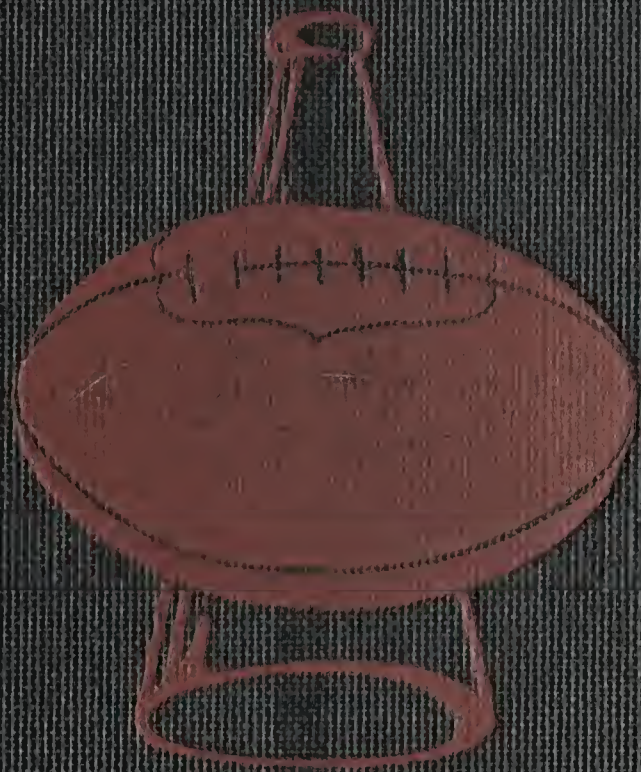


JACKSON OF HILLSDALE HIGH



EARL REED SILVERS



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JACKSON
OF HILLSDALE HIGH

By EARL REED SILVERS

DICK ARNOLD OF RARITAN COLLEGE

DICK ARNOLD PLAYS THE GAME

DICK ARNOLD OF THE VARSITY

NED BEALS, FRESHMAN

AT HILLSDALE HIGH

NED BEALS WORKS HIS WAY

JACKSON OF HILLSDALE HIGH



TONY WAS SETTING AN UNUSUALLY FAST PACE

[page 112]

JACKSON

OF HILLSDALE HIGH

BY

EARL REED SILVERS

AUTHOR OF "AT HILLSDALE HIGH," "NED BEALS WORKS HIS WAY,"
"DICK ARNOLD OF RABITAN COLLEGE," ETC.



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R.

TO
HOMER L. SHEFFER
AND
HAROLD W. SCHENCK

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JACKSON OF HILLSDALE HIGH

CHAPTER I

THE RESCUE

“WE call it Sunrise Camp,” the older man explained, “because, from our location on the hill, we can see the sun come up over King Mountain every morning.”

The eyes of the three boys lighted eagerly, and Ward Jackson grinned.

“You don’t mean to say, do you,” he demanded, “that we have to get up as early as *that*?”

“Not unless you want to. The bugle sounds at seven o’clock.”

“How about the guy who blows the bugle?” Ward asked.

“He’s out of luck,” Stretch Magens put in.

They relapsed into momentary silence, while the big river steamer, its giant engines throbbing, sailed majestically on between shaded banks.

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"Gee!" Ward said, and stretched his legs luxuriously. "This is great."

Mr. Frank Merritt, teacher of English in the Hillsdale High School, and Coach of the track and football teams, smiled indulgently. The four of them were seated comfortably on the rear deck of one of the boats of the Hudson River Night Line; it was still early evening, and the golden sun enveloped them in its mellow rays. Mr. Merritt, a sense of deep peace encompassing him, regarded the three boys thoughtfully.

He had known them now for more than six months. Himself a Princeton graduate, a wounded veteran of the A. E. F., he had accepted the position at Hillsdale because it offered a chance to get back to work again after three years of the monotony of convalescence. Now, practically restored to normal strength, he was on his way to Sunrise Camp as an associate director. And because they worshiped the ground he walked on, the three boys had decided to spend the summer with him in the rugged grandeur of the New Hampshire hills.

He had little doubt of their ability to look out for themselves in a new and strange environment. Ward Jackson, stocky, sturdy, with light blue eyes and blond hair which refused to stay plastered down, was a natural leader. In spite of his irregular features and his stubby nose, there was something attractive about him, something magnetic. He was an out-

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spoken chap, honest to the core, a plugger who did not know what it was to quit—and how he could fight! Ward was destined some day to be a substantial citizen, an advocate of honesty in politics and a square deal for every man. Endowed with no special brilliance, he was, nevertheless, a clear thinker; and when he started a thing, he always finished it. A fighter who kept everlastingly at whatever he undertook to do!

Bill Barrett, his chum and inseparable companion, was built along somewhat different lines. Bill was good looking, with curly brown hair, a well-knit frame, and muscles that glided smoothly beneath taut skin. He had never yet had occasion to feel fear; and now he looked forward to his camp experiences eager and unafraid. Bill, the older man reflected, had in him the makings of a real man.

But of Stretch Magens he was not quite so sure. Stretch was a big boy; tall, broad of shoulder, and graceful. Whatever he did, he did well, with the ease and apparent lack of effort which characterized the natural athlete. But at school during the past year he had been something of a disturbing element: resentful of criticism, insistent upon what he chose to call his "rights," jealous of his athletic prestige. He was aggressive, just a bit pugnacious, and inclined to antagonize those who did not always agree with him. But he was a good fellow at heart, and he had learned during the past few months how "to take his coaching."

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"It will be a good thing for Stretch to get up to camp," Mr. Merritt told himself. "What he needs more than anything else is a broader contact with other boys."

Nevertheless, the older man was slightly dubious of Stretch's success at camp. If some one "started something," there was no telling what might happen.

Ward Jackson, his eyes on the towering profile of Storm King Mountain, turned eagerly.

"Are—are there any hills like that up at camp?" he asked.

"Plenty of them," Mr. Merritt answered.

"Tell us about it," Stretch suggested.

The older man smiled at their eagerness.

"The camp," he explained, "is located on the shore of Indian Lake, four miles from the village of Woofville, and three miles from the Canadian border."

Ward grinned irrepressibly.

"I suppose they call it Woofville," he suggested, "because old man Woof founded it back in the Middle Ages."

"Shut up!" Bill Barrett told him pleasantly. "You're rocking the boat."

"There will be about a hundred fellows," Mr. Merritt continued. "On the hillside above the lake, is a circle of tents, five men to a tent. Then there's the big mess hall, the directors' quarters, and another

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frame building which we use for a good many things when it happens to rain.”

“The three of us will live together, won’t we?” Stretch asked.

“Yes, but there’ll be two other fellows with you, of course.”

“I’d rather be alone,” Stretch contended, with just a trace of sullenness. “You can’t tell who we might get in with.”

Mr. Merritt’s eyes clouded.

“They’re all good boys, Stretch,” he declared quietly.

“I suppose so!”

“What do we do with ourselves all the time?” Ward asked.

“Almost anything you want to. There’s a swim every morning before breakfast, and after that, tennis, baseball, boating, exploring trips, and a hundred and one other things.”

“It’s going to be great,” Bill said.

“How about eats?”

“Let’s wait a while.”

Ward, tipping his chair against the cabin, swung his legs happily and gave way to pleasant reflection. At the very stern of the boat, his roving eyes discovered another boy, a dark-skinned chap with a soft straw hat pulled down far over his forehead and clothes which did not entirely fit.

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"A Wop," Ward thought. "I wonder where he's going, anyhow."

He watched curiously while the other boy, his hands thrust into his trousers' pockets, gazed curiously at the passing landscape. After a time, Ward turned to Bill Barrett.

"That fellow down there looks rather lonesome," he said. "Why not ask him to come over with us?"

But Stretch Magens shook his head.

"He's a roughneck," he answered. "And what is it to us whether he's lonesome or not?"

"Nothing, I suppose," Ward answered.

But somehow he could not keep his eyes away from the boy at the stern. The stranger, apparently tiring of doing nothing, rose to his feet finally, and leaned far over the railing. The steamer's propeller, whirling noisily, churned the water into seething foam which swept like a live thing in the wake of the speeding boat. Possibly in an effort to glimpse one of the massive blades, the boy whom Ward was watching stretched his neck curiously and leaned farther out. And then, so quickly that Ward hardly realized what had happened, he unexpectedly lost his balance, grasped desperately at the rail, and with a shrill cry of fear, tumbled overboard.

For an instant not a sound disturbed the dull throbbing of the engine, and then from somewhere on the top deck a woman's voice screamed:

"Help! help! Some one's fallen in the water!"

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"It's the fellow there in the stern," Ward rasped, and leaped forward.

He could see, in the churning water beneath him, the figure of the dark-skinned boy. His hat was gone and his arms were flailing wildly; and even as Ward looked, he turned glazed eyes upward.

"Help!" he called chokingly. "Help!"

"He can't swim," some one said.

Impulsively, acting purely on instinct, Ward Jackson slipped his arms free from his Norfolk coat, and turned shining eyes toward the two boys beside him.

"I'm going!" he snapped. "Heads up, fellows!"

As he balanced himself momentarily on the railing, a deep gong sounded somewhere from the bowels of the ship. A hoarse voice cried out warningly:

"Man overboard!"

And then Ward dove, springing far out from the gleaming sides of the steamer. He struck the water cleanly, arched his back, and came to the surface quickly. Twenty yards away, a dark figure struggled desperately in the foaming water. With short, powerful strokes, Ward fairly lifted himself in that direction.

"Hold up!" he called huskily. "I'm coming."

Dimly, from somewhere far behind him, he was conscious of the sounding of another gong.

"They're stopping the boat," he thought. "I—" His glaring eyes strained forward, opened wide in

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sudden horror. For the boy who had fallen overboard was no longer in sight.

With lips shut grimly, Ward fought his way forward.

"He can't drown!" he muttered sobbingly. "He mustn't drown!"

After a moment, he saw the figure again; glimpsed vaguely a white face lined in agony, the flashing of flailing arms.

"Hold up!" he cried. "I've almost got you."

Burying his face in the water, he swam as he never had swum before; but when he looked up again, there was nothing to be seen. And then, hardly ten feet away from him, the figure came to the surface again; but now the boy's eyes were closed and he had ceased struggling. Slowly, surely, as if in deliberate mockery, he began to sink.

Ward, in a last desperate effort at rescue, churned through the ruffled water, reached out, and seized with gripping fingers something soft and yielding. It was the coat of the dark-skinned boy who had fallen overboard.

With infinite care, Ward turned him so as to support his unconscious form more easily.

"You're all right now," he said soothingly.

But only a sob, a sob of infinite weariness, answered him.

"At least," Ward thought, "he's alive."

His own muscles were aching from the strain of

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his recent efforts, his breath came in short, painful gasps, and his legs were heavy as lead. His shoes hindered him; they seemed like weights of iron dragging him down.

“Help!” he called. “Help!”

He noticed, hardly ten feet away, a life-preserver floating lightly on the current. But it was to one side of him, and he could not reach it with the unconscious form of the other boy on his arm. He found himself wondering, with a quick intake of breath, how long he could hold out.

Then, suddenly, he was conscious of a rattle of oarlocks, and, turning his head, he discovered a small boat coming toward him. It was from the steamer, of course, but he had not imagined that they could launch it so quickly. But the sight of it gave him renewed courage, banished his apprehension. He continued to kick desperately with his feet, shifted his burden from one arm to the other, and paddled painfully with the free hand. But the ache in his limbs increased, threatening to drag him down.

“Hurry!” he choked.

Unexpectedly, his face slipped beneath the surface. Gasping, he fought upward, glimpsed the blue of the sky again. And then, a quiet voice sounded from directly over him:

“All right, we’ve got you now.”

He relaxed relievedly, permitting himself to be lifted aboard the boat and sinking down wearily in

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its ribbed bottom. He did not look up until they had reached the steamer; then, suddenly, he was aware of hundreds of curious faces looming above him. Some one started to cheer, and the sound of their voices drowned out the renewed throb of the engines. Vaguely happy, Ward turned to one of the men in the boat.

"I don't want to meet that crowd," he said. "Take me somewhere away from them, will you?"

The man grinned.

"You can go to the engine room," he answered, "and get warm."

After a time, when they had taken the unconscious boy to the captain's quarters, Ward removed his water-soaked shoes and looked up as footsteps sounded in the corridor. The door opened, and two boys entered, followed by Mr. Merritt.

"Hello!" Ward said.

Bill Barrett grinned into his lowered eyes.

"You're a blooming hero," he announced. "The whole boat's yelling for a sight of you."

Ward grimaced.

"It wasn't anything. I just happened to see the guy first. I—I—how is he, anyhow?"

"You mean the Wop?" It was Stretch Magens speaking. "He'll be as good as ever in a couple of hours, the boat doctor says. Hit the lower deck when he fell and had the breath knocked out of him. But there's no bones broken or anything like that."

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Ward smiled happily.

“Gee, that’s fine!”

“He’s conscious now,” Stretch continued, “and when you feel like coming, he wants to see you.”

“Can’t you just tell him it’s all right,” Ward protested. “I hate this thank-you stuff.”

But Mr. Merritt shook his head.

“It’s up to you, Ward,” he announced quietly, “to give him a chance to express his gratitude.”

“I suppose so!” Ward spoke reluctantly. “But I sure do hate to do it. Probably we’ll never see each other again.”

“You can’t be too sure about that,” Bill Barrett put in. “We’ve learned something about him, and he’s on his way to the Pinetree Camp.”

“Where’s that?” Ward asked.

“On Indian Lake,” Mr. Merritt told him. “And Pinetree is Sunrise’s closest and most bitter rival.”

CHAPTER II

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

LATER in the evening, when Ward Jackson entered the dining room of the steamer, people looked up at him curiously and smiled into his embarrassed eyes. Stretch Magens, nudging his aching ribs, grinned provokingly.

"The band will now play 'Hail, the Conquering Hero Comes,'" he said. "What's the matter with those fellows, anyhow?"

"Cut it out," Ward pleaded. His eager eyes searched the menu ravenously. "How about a big juicy steak," he suggested, "some French fried potatoes, ice cream and apple pie?"

"Right-o!" Stretch answered. "Only I think I'll have a plate of soup, too."

When eventually the food was placed before them, they wasted little time in conversation. They were hungry, and the business of eating was a serious matter. Ward, forgetting the impending interview with the dark-skinned boy whose life he had saved, cleared the last vestige of pie *à la mode* from his plate and leaned back comfortably.

"How about some more dessert?" Bill Barrett asked hopefully.

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

But Mr. Merritt shook his head.

"I don't want any sick boys on my hands," he declared. "You fellows have eaten enough now to feed any army."

The others agreed reluctantly, stuffed their hands into their trousers' pockets, and beckoned importantly to the waiter.

"How much do we owe you?" Bill asked.

With assumed indifference, the white-shirted negro placed the written record of their indebtedness before them.

"Whew!" Stretch groaned. "He must think we're trying to buy the boat."

"The prices are right there on the menu," Mr. Merritt reminded them. "Fork up, you fellows, and a quarter tip from each of you."

They made change finally, accepted the mumbled thanks of the beaming waiter, and shuffled to their feet. Ward, with characteristic decision, shut his lips resolutely.

"Might as well go see the—that other fellow now," he said. "But I'd like to have you men go along with me."

"We'll back you up," Bill promised. "Come on and let's get it over with."

"He's a millionaire in disguise, or something like that," Stretch declared. "He's got a terribly sporty room off the main salon—a bridal suite, I think they call it."

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They found the dark-skinned boy propped up in bed, with one of the ship's minor officers reading beneath a shaded lamp in one corner. Ward, entering awkwardly, grinned embarrassedly.

"Glad to see you're coming along all right," he said.

The other boy glanced up eagerly, his big black eyes glowing.

"I—I am under deep obligation to you," he announced slowly, picking his words carefully and speaking haltingly, as if he was not quite sure of himself. "If it had not been for you, I would have—have been dead."

"It wasn't as bad as that," Ward hastened to assure him. "You can swim, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, I—I am a strong swimmer. But when I fall, I strike my chest against the lower deck and it take my breath away. I—I do not remember much after that."

There was a moment of awkward silence, while Ward shifted his feet restlessly and tried to think of something to say.

"The doctor tells us that you will be as well as ever in the morning," Mr. Merritt put in. "You're on the way to Pinetree Camp, aren't you?"

"Yes." The boy's eyes were somber. "My name," he announced, "is Antonio Cuppola."

"And these fellows are Ward Jackson, Bill Barrett,

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and Stretch Magens. I hope you will all be the best of friends."

"With Mr. Jackson," Tony answered quietly, "I will always be friends."

"We'll see a lot of you this summer, I hope."

"Yes." The other boy's face clouded momentarily. "In a way," he said, "we will be what you call rivals. My camp and your camp are not friendly. But we can be friends also, can we not?"

"Sure we can," Ward answered. His glance wandered toward the door. "Guess we'll be going," he suggested, "so that you can get some sleep."

Nodding, the visitors turned, but Antonio Cuppola held up a restraining hand.

"Mr. Jackson," he began.

"My name's Ward," Ward told him.

"Mr. Ward, I—I am never unmindful of what you have done for me. And if I can ever pay back, I want you to know that you can count on me. It isn't much, but—but will you shake my hand?"

"Sure!"

Their grips met; and as Ward looked down at the boy before him, he saw in his shining eyes loyalty, and sincerity, and unquestioned friendship.

"It really wasn't anything," Ward told him. "Let's forget it."

But Tony shook his head gravely.

"I will never forget," he answered.

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Once outside the room, Stretch Magens turned to his companions and grinned amusedly.

"The Wop talks like an English professor," he announced.

But Ward did not smile.

"Tony's all right," he said quietly.

"But he's a Wop, just the same."

"What difference does that make?"

Stretch's eyes shifted before Ward's challenging gaze.

"Nothing, I suppose," he admitted. "Only, I—I haven't got much use for these foreigners."

"A man's a man, whether he is an American or a South Sea Islander," Mr. Merritt put in. "How about bed, you fellows?"

"Let's wait a while," Stretch protested.

"But Ward's probably tired."

"Oh, all right."

But after he was settled in a lower bunk in the room which he shared with Bill Barrett, Ward found it hard to get to sleep. He was physically weary and the muscles of his back ached dully, but his mind was active. He wondered vaguely if he would ever see Tony again, and marveled a bit at his own courage in diving into the seething water of the river. But he told himself stanchly that really he hadn't done anything unusual; Stretch Magens, who was a good swimmer, would have done the same thing, if—if he had thought about it. It was luck, more than any-

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

thing else, which had enabled him to save Tony. The best thing to do, he decided just before he drifted into unconsciousness, was to forget all about it. Tony, of course, would find no way of paying back. Of course not. . . .

The steamer had already docked at Albany when they awoke. Mr. Merritt, who had been up for almost an hour, grinned into their sleepy eyes.

"The train for Indian Lake leaves at eight-thirty," he announced. "That will give us just time enough to have breakfast on shore and get down to the station."

"Will any of the other fellows be on the train?" Bill asked.

"Some of them. But the majority are going by the way of Boston."

"Seen Tony yet?"

"Yes, he's all right. And he's going to have breakfast with us."

Stretch Magens frowned.

"The next thing we know, he'll be moving over to our camp."

"He can't do that. He's signed up for Pinetree."

"Let's get going!"

They found Tony waiting for them at the dock, apparently completely recovered from his unpleasant experience of the night before. He greeted them with a shy friendliness which went straight to Ward

JACKSON OF HILLSDALE HIGH

Jackson's heart; but Stretch only nodded indifferently and turned to the others.

"Where do we eat?"

"How about the station?"

"Costs too much," Bill put in. "Another meal like supper yesterday, and I'd be stone broke."

"I would be much honored," Tony Cuppola announced, "if you will let me be your host for breakfast."

"Oh, I say!" Ward protested. Tony didn't look as if he had very much money to spend on such entertainment.

"We haven't much time," Bill Barrett said. "Let's find a lunch room somewhere."

"Why not the station?" Tony argued. "And I would be honored."

"Couldn't think of it," Stretch snapped.

But, unexpectedly, Mr. Merritt accepted for all of them.

"We'll be glad to be your guests, Tony," he announced quietly. "And it is good of you to ask us."

The eyes of the Italian boy lighted in quick gratitude.

"Thank you!"

He led the way across the cobbled street to the glittering restaurant of the neighboring station, proudly took his place at the head of a table for five, and summoned a hovering waiter.

"What will you have?" he asked politely.

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

Stretch Magens sneered in sudden ill humor.

"The thing to order, I suppose, is spaghetti," he suggested.

Tony's eyes were puzzled, and just a bit hurt.

"I—I would choose something else," he began uncertainly.

"Stretch got out of the wrong side of the bed," Ward broke in. "Don't mind him, Tony."

Mr. Merritt, glancing at his watch, spoke crisply.

"Some grapefruit," he ordered, "cold cereal, coffee and rolls. That goes for all of us."

There was no protest; and while the waiter was preparing the order, Ward turned curiously to Tony.

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Very well, thank you."

"Where's your home town, Tony?" Bill Barrett inquired curiously.

"New York." The boy still spoke hesitatingly, in softly modulated voice. "My father," he continued, "is what you call a contractor. I have been in this country for only two years, and I do not speak your language very well."

"Go to high school?"

"Yes, I am in the first year. But it is hard."

"It'll be easier after a while." Ward turned as the waiter appeared, burdened with plates. Just before they started on the grapefruit, he held a glass of water high over his head.

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"A toast, men," he suggested, "to Tony Cuppola, American!"

Laughingly, they responded—all but Stretch, whose glass stood untouched. And after that, they ate in silence, a sense of restraint heavy upon them.

"Stretch ought to have his face pushed in," Ward thought.

But he did not say anything, and he was glad when the meal was finished and Mr. Merritt suggested that they hurry along.

"The train isn't a very long one," he explained, "and we ought to get there early in order to find seats."

They waited until Tony paid the check, and Ward noticed that he tipped the waiter handsomely. But when, on the way across the station, he mentioned it to Stretch, the other boy only snorted.

"Trying to show off!"

The train was hardly half filled when finally they climbed aboard. But there a problem presented itself, for even with one of the seats turned over, there was room for only four of them, and the party consisted of five.

"You boys sit together," Mr. Merritt suggested, "and I'll find a place somewhere else."

"It—it will be better for me to sit alone," Tony contended. "I am a stranger, you know, and——"

"We don't want to lose you so soon," Ward protested. "Let's——"

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

But Stretch Magens had already slipped his suitcase into a seat directly in front of theirs.

"*I'm* sitting alone," he announced emphatically. "I'd prefer it that way."

A slow wave of red crept into Tony Cuppola's face, and the others looked up wonderingly. But Mr. Merritt's jaw snapped shut.

"Very well," he said.

Stretch's attitude, however, had cast a damper upon them; and after they had deposited their baggage on the overhanging racks, they relapsed into silence, watching with curious eyes while the train filled rapidly, until practically all the seats were taken. Laughing boys, who Ward suspected were on their way to Sunrise or Pinetree, shuffled happily down the aisle, beaming at their fellow passengers and making audible comments about nothing in particular. They looked like good fellows, and Ward found himself hoping that he would get to know some of them.

"Ever been to camp before?" he asked Tony.

"No, I'm a stranger here."

"How did you happen to select Pinetree?"

"I saw an advertisement in a magazine," Tony explained, "and sent for a—a catalogue, I think you call it."

"And you don't know anybody there?"

"No."

Tony's eyes were wistful, and Mr. Merritt, leaning forward, laid a kindly hand on the boy's knee.

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"Possibly," he said quietly, "some of the fellows in camp may try to have some fun with you, Tony. But I'd take it all in good part if I were you."

Tony looked up doubtfully.

"What do you mean, have fun with me?" he asked.

"They'll probably try to give you the razz," Ward put in.

But Tony shook his head helplessly.

"I don't quite understand."

"It's this way," Mr. Merritt explained slowly. "When a new boy attends camp for the first time, and hasn't any particular friends among the other fellows, sometimes they initiate him. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Yes," Tony answered.

"And possibly, some of the boys at Pinetree may make you sing a song or do something foolish. But it's all in fun, Tony."

"Yes," Tony said again. His big, black eyes looked thoughtfully out of the open window. "And whatever happens," he remarked finally, "I must take it like a man. Is that what you mean, sir?"

Mr. Merritt nodded.

"Yes," he answered quietly. "That's the American way, Tony."

"And the way, also, of my own country," the Italian boy answered.

"You're all right, Tony," Ward said.

They relapsed into silence, while the small engine

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

up ahead puffed audibly, and a whistle blew in sharp warning.

"Going to start now," Bill Barrett announced.

In front of them, Stretch Magens slumped in his cushioned seat, his bulging suitcase beside him. He looked up resentfully when a pleasant-faced boy burdened with much baggage paused beside him.

"This seat taken?" the boy asked.

Stretch frowned.

"Can't you see it's got a bag on it?" he demanded.

"Yes, but is it being reserved for any one?"

"No."

"I'd like to sit there, if you don't mind."

For a moment, Stretch looked up defiantly.

"I don't see why you can't find some place else," he said angrily. "But if you want to be mean about it. . . ."

"There isn't any other seat. But if you've bought two tickets, of course. . . ."

Without bothering to reply, Stretch stood up, lifted his suitcase to the rack and moved over grudgingly.

"Thank you!"

"Don't mention it," Stretch answered sarcastically, and turned sullenly to the window.

A moment later, the train puffed its way out of the station: and Stretch, maintaining his silence, cupped his chin in his palm and gazed moodily at the passing country.

Behind him, he could hear the low voices of Ward

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and the others, talking of football, of high school days, of the prospects of adventure which lay ahead of them.

"I wish I hadn't come," Stretch muttered.

The boy beside him glanced up curiously.

"I beg your pardon!"

Stretch frowned into his questioning eyes.

"I didn't say anything."

"Oh!"

Silence fell between them again.

"At Sunrise," Ward Jackson declared, "I think I'll go out for the swimming team. I'm not any good at baseball, and Stretch can beat the tar out of me at tennis. How about you, Tony?"

"I swam a good deal in Italy," Tony answered. "At Pinetree. . . ."

Stretch's seat mate turned curiously.

"You fellows going up to camp?" he asked.

"To Sunrise," Bill Barrett answered. "All except Tony here."

"I'm on my way to Sunrise, too."

The stranger slipped out of his seat and extended his hand.

"Skillman's my name—Rex Skillman."

"My name's Barrett," Bill told him. "And these other two fellows are Ward Jackson and Tony Cupola. Mr. Merritt is one of our counselors."

Skillman settled himself on the arm of Ward's seat.

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

“Ever been there before, you fellows?”

“No, have you?”

“No.” The new boy smiled. “We’ll all be green as grass.”

Ward regarded the back of Stretch Magens’ head thoughtfully. After a moment, he spoke:

“Oh, Stretch!”

The other boy turned.

“Yes?” he asked coldly.

“This is Rex Skillman, who’s going to be at camp with us,” Ward told him.

Stretch nodded, but made no move to shake hands; and after a moment of awkwardness, Rex grinned.

“I’m glad to know you.”

“Don’t mention it,” Stretch said, and turned away to further contemplation of the scenery.

Bill Barrett winced.

“Never mind,” he whispered to Skillman. “He’s got a grouch on, but he’ll be all right after a while.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Rex said.

But the incident had left a bitter taste in their mouths. Mr. Merritt’s eyes were troubled, but he made no comment; and after a time the four boys forgot the restraint which Stretch’s actions had thrown over them and chatted happily about a hundred and one things of mutual interest.

They chided Tony Cuppola a bit for having selected the wrong camp.

“What you ought to do,” Bill told him, “is to

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resign from Pinetree just as soon as you get there and then move your stuff over to Sunrise.”

But Tony, his face serious, shook his head gravely.

“No,” he answered, “I’ve selected Pinetree and I’m going to stay there all summer.” His dark eyes grew wistful. “I hope the boys will like me,” he added.

“Of course they will,” Ward told him.

The train drew suddenly to a grinding halt, and the conductor, sticking his head through the door, called loudly:

“Middleburg! Ten minutes for lunch.”

Instantly the car was in an uproar. Boys leaped from their seats and piled pell-mell upon the station platform.

“Oh, boy!” Bill said. “Come on, you men!”

They pushed forward, grateful for the interruption of the monotony of the trip. Ward Jackson, glancing back just as he was to leave the train, noted that Stretch Magens had not moved. After a moment of hesitation, Ward turned and approached his school-mate.

“Come on, Stretch!” he said easily. “It’s time to eat.”

But the other boy regarded him in angry stubbornness.

“I don’t want anything.”

“Don’t be a crab,” Ward told him. “Come ahead.”

STRETCH GROWS RESENTFUL

But Stretch, who had been nourishing his "grouch" for the past three hours, refused to be persuaded.

"Why worry about me?" he asked. "You've got other friends now to occupy your time."

Ward waited uncertainly. He knew from past experience that Stretch, in his present frame of mind, was absolutely unmanageable. The best thing to do, he decided, was to leave Stretch to himself.

"All right," he said, and left the car without further word, while Stretch gazed after him in mingled anger and chagrin.

At the lunch counter, Ward fought his way toward a large pile of sandwiches, managed to get hold of a glass of milk and to finish his hurried meal before the time limit.

"All aboard!" the conductor boomed.

The others rushed to the train again; but Ward waited for a moment before the deserted counter.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Two ham sandwiches. Here's your money."

The attendant handed him the sandwiches, wrapped in waxed paper; and Ward, sprinting across the platform, just managed to swing aboard the last car. A few seconds later, he found Stretch sitting alone in dignified silence.

"Here," Ward said, handing over his bundle, "you might want them before we reach camp."

Stretch looked up gratefully, and for an instant

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the stubborn lines disappeared from around his mouth.

“Thanks!” he muttered.

Long before they reached their destination, the sandwiches were gone. Stretch’s hunger had conquered his pride.

But Stretch continued in his refusal to join the others; and when finally the train rolled into the Mountainville station, he gathered up his bags and followed Ward to the platform without comment. Here, however, there was so much bustle and confusion that even Stretch forgot to be angry.

CHAPTER III

THE SILVER CUP

THE camp was even better than they had expected. A large semicircle of tents nestled on a sloping hillside facing the gleaming waters of Indian Lake. Below them, through the open flap of their own tent, they could see the "navy," a flotilla of canoes, round-bottomed rowboats and launches, drawn up on the sandy beach or anchored at safe distance from the shore. Two docks, about thirty yards apart, jutted out into the water, and were joined by a wide floating raft, forming an out-door swimming pool of ideal proportions.

In the center of the circle of tents stood a low-roofed dining hall, and about a hundred feet to the north, its gaunt sides unpainted, a large frame building which was known as the armory and used only in rainy weather. From the opposite side of the lake, a mile or more away, towered the verdant hills of the White Mountains, bathed now in the golden glow of the early afternoon sun.

"Gee, this is great!" Ward said.

"The first thing to do," Mr. Merritt told them, "is to go to the camp office and find out the number of

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your tent. Then you can unpack and get settled. I'll have to leave you now."

In the office, at one end of a low shack near the center of camp, an elderly man greeted them smilingly.

"Name?" he asked.

"Jackson, Barrett and Magens," Ward told him. "We'll be together, I think."

The man glanced over a list before him.

"Yes," he said, "you'll be in tent 7, with two other boys—Skillman and Lockwood."

At the announcement, Rex Skillman grinned.

"It seems," he remarked, "as if you're going to have me wished on you."

"That's fine," Ward answered.

But Stretch Magens said never a word. He followed the others to the tent which had been assigned them, glanced inside critically, and then, suddenly resolute, turned to Rex Skillman.

"I'm sorry," he said, "for being such a crab on the train."

Rex looked up wonderingly. He hadn't expected any such action from Stretch, and he was frankly surprised. But he recovered himself instantly.

"Let's forget it," he suggested. "We're tent mates now."

"Thanks!"

Ward Jackson, noting the incident, breathed a sigh of infinite relief. He knew Stretch well enough to

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realize that it would probably take a long time for him to get over his antagonism to Rex; but at least he had made a start and had done a big thing in apologizing.

"Stretch is all right underneath," Ward told himself.

Tired from the long trip, they seated themselves before the tent.

"This is my first season at any camp," Rex Skillman announced. "Always before I've spent the summer at the seashore, but my mother and dad have gone to Europe this year and so they shipped me up here."

"Think you'll like it?"

"I sure will." He was silent for a moment. "I'm not much good in athletics," he said, "except at tennis. But there are some good courts here, and there's a tournament every year. I'm going out for the camp championship."

Stretch Magens eyes widened.

"Are you sure they have a tournament?" he asked.

"Yes, with a gold medal for the winner."

Stretch grinned, but not altogether pleasantly.

"I have a little hunch that I'd like to win that thing."

The other boy looked up curiously.

"Play much?"

"All summer long. And I was champion of Hillsdale."

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"Where's that?"

"In New Jersey."

Rex was silent for a moment.

"I played Court number two for the varsity at Exeter Academy," he announced finally. "Maybe we'll meet in the tournament."

"Maybe we will."

"Well, may the best man win." Rex turned to the others. "My luggage hasn't come in yet," he said. "Think I'll run over to the armory and look it up."

"See you later?"

"Yes."

After he had gone, Stretch turned to Bill and Ward with glowing eyes.

"That fellow gives me a pain," he declared. "He's got a head as big as a barn door."

"Seems like a mighty good chap to me," Ward answered.

"*Everybody* seems all right to you." Stretch spoke irritably. "The first thing you do is to make friends with an ignorant Wop and spoil the trip up here, and then you take an absolute stranger's part against me."

"I'm not taking anybody's part," Ward contended. "But it looks to me, Stretch, as if you sure did get out of the wrong side of the bed this morning."

"Bosh!"

Tactfully, Bill Barrett changed the subject.

"There are five boys to each tent here at camp,"

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he said. "That means that we'll have another fellow with us. Wonder who he'll be?"

"Probably some stuck-up prig like Skillman," Stretch remarked. "I don't see why the three of us couldn't have been given a tent just to ourselves."

Ward grinned.

"That's a part of camp life," he answered. "It's a good thing for us to get to know other fellows." He looked over at Stretch slyly. "Sort of keeps us from thinking that maybe we're the whole show," he added.

"Meaning?" Stretch asked.

"Nothing," Ward told him.

They relapsed into silence, watching curiously while a big auto bus drove up with a group of boys who had come in on the Boston train. There was a good deal of confusion; loud words of greeting by boys who had not seen one another since the preceding summer, detailed directions about baggage, friendly arguments over work to be done and tents to be cleared.

"Sort of makes us feel out of things," Ward remarked wistfully.

"Oh, we'll get to know the others pretty soon."

"Wish I hadn't come," Stretch grumbled.

After a time, they saw Rex Skillman returning, in the company of a broad-shouldered, curly-headed boy, with a square chin and jolly gray eyes.

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"This is 'Curly' Lockwood," Rex announced, when they had reached the tent. "He and I were classmates at Exeter, but we didn't know until now that both of us were coming to Sunrise."

"Glad to know you fellows," Curly declared pleasantly. "Looks as though we're going to have a whale of a time."

"Been here before?" Ward asked.

"Two years."

"Last year," Rex Skillman put in, "he won the Silver Cup."

"What's that?"

"At the end of every season," Rex explained, "a big cup is given to that fellow who has done the most for Sunrise—for its athletic prestige, its spirit, and things like that. It's good stuff."

"Sure is," Ward answered.

He glanced up at Curly Lockwood with renewed respect, and with just a touch of awe. A natural leader, Ward decided; a *he*-man.

"We're honored to have you with us," Bill Barrett announced.

"The honor," Curly answered with an elaborate bow, "is all mine." Turning, he peered curiously into the homelike tent. "We ought to choose a leader," he said.

"A leader of what?"

"A group leader. Each tent has to appoint a man to be general boss, you know."

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"I didn't know," Ward said. "But I guess the job rightfully belongs to you."

"We'll have to take a vote on it."

"I nominate Ward Jackson," Stretch announced unexpectedly.

Ward frowned.

"I've already put Curly's name up."

"Let's take a vote on it," Rex Skillman suggested.

He found an old envelope in his pocket and tore it into narrow strips.

"Write the name of your man on these," he directed, "and turn them back to me."

Ward wrote Lockwood's name on the piece of paper, and handed it to the self-appointed teller. He had no doubt whatever of Curly's fitness for tent leader, and he expected him to get it. But Rex, after he had counted the ballots, turned smilingly to Ward.

"Jackson has three votes," he announced, "and Lockwood two."

Ward's eyes opened wide with surprise; but he knew at once what had happened. Stretch and Bill had voted for him.

"That's bad business," he thought. "We mustn't have the tent divided right away."

But Curly Lockwood apparently held no resentment.

"The voice of the people has spoken," he said lightly. "And now, Captain Ward, what are your orders?"

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"I haven't any," Ward told him, "but I sure would like to take a swim."

"Can't do it until four o'clock," the other boy answered. "And as for me, I'm going inside and unpack."

When he and Rex had gone, Stretch Magens turned to his two chums with sparkling eyes.

"I guess we put something over on the highbrows that time," he remarked.

There was a troubled moment of silence, then:

"Those fellows aren't any more highbrows than we are," Ward said quietly, "and Curly Lockwood ought to have been leader of this tent. We haven't been playing square."

"He isn't any more of a leader than you are," Stretch answered. "And even if he did win the Silver Cup last year, he needn't think he's got it cinched *this* summer."

"Thinking of winning it yourself?" Bill asked dryly.

"Not exactly. But there's no telling what Ward might do, you know."

"Nonsense!" Ward said. But even as he spoke, he was mindful of Bill Barrett's thoughtful eyes upon him.

"How about setting the tent to rights?" Bill suggested.

"Let's go in!"

They drew lots for the cots, arranged their clothing

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in the broad wooden chests beneath each bed, agreed unanimously that each fellow should be responsible for his own particular section of the tent, and grew to know one another amazingly well during the next hour. But through it all, Stretch Magens remained moodily silent, and, although he thawed out a bit before Curly Lockwood's obvious good nature, he responded sullenly to Rex Skillman's efforts at friendship.

"I sure do wish," Ward whispered to Bill Barrett, "that Stretch would get over his grouch."

But Stretch maintained his attitude of injured dignity until, at four o'clock, the sharp notes of a bugle sounded from the direction of the float.

"That means the regular afternoon swim," Curly announced. "And, oh, boy, won't the water feel good?"

They dug out their bathing suits from beneath the cots, slipped them on quickly, and hurried down to the water. Ward noticed, as they waited on one of the docks, that many of the boys wore an elaborate insignia, "S C," on the front of their jerseys.

"Do you have to win the right to wear those letters?" he asked Rex Skillman.

The other boy nodded.

"Yes," he answered. "You've got to be a member of the camp baseball or swimming team, or a semi-finalist in the tennis tournament."

"When are they awarded?"

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"Any time after the first three weeks." Rex's lips shut grimly. "I'm going to try hard," he added, "to get mine in tennis. What are you going out for, anyhow?"

"Swimming," Ward said.

Mr. Merritt, who had charge of all water sports at the camp, walked out to the end of the dock and called the boys around him.

"Only those men who have been here last year and passed the regular tests are permitted to swim from the far side of the float," he announced. "The rest of you will have to stay in the pool until to-morrow, when the tests are given."

"Can we go in now?" some one asked eagerly.

"Yes."

Curly Lockwood, raising muscled arms over his head, dove cleanly into the gleaming waters of the lake.

"Let's go!"

Ward, waiting uncertainly, turned questioningly to Mr. Merritt.

"Do I have to stay in the pool?" he asked.

The older man regarded him smilingly.

"I guess not, Ward," he answered. "We're counting on you, you know, to be our biggest point winner in the water this year."

"Are the fellows much good?"

"Lockwood's the best. But you've had more experience, I think."

"Well, here goes!"

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Ward took a running dive off the end of the dock, came slowly to the surface, and struck out, with powerful strokes, after the bobbing head of Curly Lockwood. But although he did his best, he could not catch the other boy until Curly reached the diving platform, a hundred feet from the shore. Curly, watching him climb aboard, grinned into his shining eyes.

"Where did you learn the six-beat crawl?" he demanded.

"At school in New York, before I moved to Hillsdale," Ward answered. "Gee, this is great, isn't it?"

"It sure is."

For a long time they basked in the mellow sunshine, watching the antics of the boys in the inclosed pool, speaking occasionally, but mostly content to remain silent.

"It looks very much," Curly said finally, "as if you and I are the best two swimmers in camp."

"I'm not much good," Ward protested.

"I'm not so sure about that. How about a race to shore?"

Ward nodded; and a moment later Mr. Merritt, cupping his hands, called out to them.

"How about coming in, you fellows?"

"Right-o!" Curly yelled back at him. "We're going to make a race of it."

The other boys, hearing the announcement, gathered on the float and waited curiously. Ward and Curly crouched on the edge of the platform, and at

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the word "go" leaped off together. But Ward, swimming strongly, took the lead almost instantly, increasing his advantage as the race progressed, until, when he touched the float, he was the winner by a clean three yards.

Curly, drawing himself out of the water, turned wonderingly, and with a new respect, to the boy beside him.

"You made me look like a novice," he said quietly. "And that means, of course, that you'll be chosen captain of the camp swimming team."

"I don't think so," Ward answered. "You've been here before, you know, and the fellows——"

But Curly interrupted him.

"You'll be elected without doubt," he contended, "because you deserve it." He was silent for a moment, his face thoughtful. "I was baseball captain last year," he continued, "and I guess I'll get it again. And that means, that, as the two varsity captains, we'll be the closest in line for the Silver Cup."

"I won't have a chance in the world," Ward protested. "You'll get it, of course."

But the other boy shook his head.

"It'll be a toss-up," he decided. "And—and, say, Ward, how about shaking on it?"

They shook hands gravely; and Ward, looking into the gray eyes of the boy beside him, found there no trace of hostility—only honest rivalry and friendship.

CHAPTER IV

BASEBALL

DIRECTLY after supper on that first memorable day at Sunrise, Dr. Southard, venerable director of the camp, called together the hundred-odd boys under his charge for a twilight mass meeting. Very carefully, and in patient detail, he explained to them the various rules and regulations, mentioned the Silver Cup, the baseball and swimming contests with Pinetree, and the winning of the camp insignia. And when he had finished, he introduced Mr. Merritt as the man who would be closest to them in all personal relations.

Ward Jackson himself started the applause which greeted Mr. Merritt as he took his place in the midst of the circle of beaming faces.

“Men,” the new counselor announced quietly, “there are only a few words which I have to say to you. In all our dealings with our fellows, whether it be in school, or in camp, or in the everyday walks of life, the same fundamental truths stand clearly outlined. They are honesty of purpose, and loyalty, and a square deal for every man. And here at Sunrise, in the weeks that lie ahead of us, I want you to

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remember that the camp has traditions which must be lived up to, standards which must be met, ideals which must not be forgotten. And now, as members of the Sunrise Camp, it is up to us to stand true to the traditions which have been handed down to us; to cherish its good name, to uphold its standards, and to fight everlastingly for the honor of the camp."

With a slight inclination of his head, the speaker slipped quietly to his place beside Dr. Southard; and for a moment, only tense silence greeted him. And then, unexpectedly, Curly Lockwood leaped to his feet.

"A long yell," he called, "for our new counselor—Mr. Frank Merritt!"

Ward Jackson was not exactly sure what "the long yell" was; but he added his own lusty voice to the volume of sound which swept across the silent lake, and he noticed out of the corner of his eye that Stretch Magens was cheering as loudly as the others.

The words of the older man remained with him after the meeting had been concluded. Sitting before the open flap of his tent, in front of a tiny fire which Rex Skillman had built, he glanced speculatively at his tent mates, listening quietly to their occasional comments, noting with grim satisfaction that Stretch himself seemed now to be one of them, that his sullenness had gone. And the next morning, when he awoke to the golden notes of a bugle, Stretch was the first to greet him.

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"All out for a swim!" Curly called, and they slipped into their bathing suits and rushed joyously down the hill to where Mr. Merritt was waiting at the float.

The day slipped by seemingly on wings. Directly after breakfast, Stretch Magens dug out his tennis racket and followed Bill Barrett to the level tennis courts behind the armory. Rex Skillman, on an adjoining court, played dashingly against a fellow he had picked up from tent number 6, while Stretch regarded him with critical eyes and grew increasingly dubious of his own ability to win the coming tournament. At noon, when he joined the others at lunch, some of his sullenness of the day before had returned. But at least he tried to be pleasant, and that, Ward felt, was a step in the right direction. After a week or two at camp, Ward reflected, Stretch would be straightened out.

In the afternoon, a meeting was called for all swimming candidates: twenty or more eager-eyed boys who gave their names to Mr. Merritt and told modestly of their achievements and experience.

"It looks like a good squad," the instructor announced finally. "And I suppose the first thing that we should do is to elect a captain."

"I nominate Ward Jackson," Stretch Magens said.

There was a moment of silence; then Curly Lockwood spoke.

"I second the nomination."

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Rex Skillman cleared his throat huskily.

"I was going to put up *your* name," he began.

But Curly shook his head.

"Ward's a better man than I am," he announced, "and all you fellows know it."

"Oh, I say!"

"And I move," Curly continued, "that Jackson be unanimously elected."

Under the circumstances, there was nothing else to do; and a minute later, Ward Jackson, newly elected captain of the camp swimming team, turned shining eyes to the boy beside him.

"I'm beginning to understand now," he said quietly, "why it is that you won the Silver Cup last year."

Curly grinned pleasantly.

"Easy on the soft stuff!" he warned. "How about some practice?"

They found, after checking up, that prospects for a winning team were bright. Stretch Magens and Rex Skillman were both candidates for the fifty and one hundred yard dashes, Curly and Ward were the best of the long-distance swimmers, and there were among the others some experienced men in the fancy dive, the plunge, the backstroke, and the breast stroke.

"We'll have three meets," Mr. Merritt explained. "One with the town boys of Millford, one with Moonlight Camp, and the final affair with Pinetree. And

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if each of us gives his best, we have an even chance of winning."

"And that's all that we ask," Ward added.

After the first practice was finished, he attended a meeting of the baseball candidates; not because he had any hopes of making the team, but because he was anxious to see Curly Lockwood elected captain. He found, however, that Curly was generally recognized as the best baseball player in camp, and when he had been chosen unanimously to lead the varsity nine, Ward smiled happily. And even though he remembered vividly the other boy's prediction concerning the Silver Cup, he kept on smiling. For he knew that, no matter how strong the rivalry, they would still be friends.

And the more Ward saw of Curly Lockwood, the better he liked him. As the days wore on, they were in frequent contact as members of the swimming team; and, although Curly gave his mornings to baseball, the evenings were free, and the five tent mates spent many long hours together. Only Stretch Magens did not seem to fit.

Ward was frankly worried about Stretch. The spirit of the camp, the traditions of which Mr. Merritt had spoken so eloquently, apparently made no impression upon him. For Stretch, Ward suspected, thought more of himself than he did of Sunrise.

He decided finally to speak to Mr. Merritt about it, to see if something could not be done to bring

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Stretch to his senses and to awaken in him the same loyalty for Sunrise that he had shown for Hillsdale High School.

Slipping away from the others, he found the counselor giving a swimming lesson to one of the younger boys. Ward waited quietly until the lesson was ended, and then broached his subject.

"Are you very busy just now?" he asked.

The older man grinned into his serious eyes.

"No," he answered. "What's on your mind, Ward?"

"Stretch Magens," Ward told him.

"Supposing," Mr. Merritt suggested, "that we get a canoe and paddle out into the middle of the lake. Then we can talk without any one interrupting us."

"That will be fine."

For a long time, they paddled quietly. Somehow, out there on the lake, with the distant mountains towering toward the blue of the sky, the problem of Stretch Magens became suddenly of only minor importance.

"It's great out here," Ward said.

"It surely is."

They relapsed into silence again, while their polished paddles cleaved the smooth water and the canoe glided gracefully forward. The muscles of Ward's arms rippled beneath taut skin, his shoulders were the color of mahogany, his skin was clear, his eyes bright.

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"There's nothing quite like a summer at camp," he thought, "to put a fellow in condition."

Mr. Merritt, slipping his paddle beneath the seat, turned and regarded Ward smilingly.

"Well?" he asked.

The direct question roused Ward from his reverie.

"I'm worried about Stretch," he explained.

"What about him?"

"Ever since camp started he's been a regular old crab. He hasn't forgotten that first time he met Rex Skillman, and for some reason or other he doesn't like Curly Lockwood. I'm wondering if there isn't something we can do about it."

"I don't think so." Mr. Merritt spoke gravely. "Stretch," as you know," he continued, "is a peculiar chap. He passes snap judgment on people, and when he gets an idea in his head, it's like pulling teeth to change him. But underneath it all, I think that Stretch has in him the makings of a real man."

"Yes," Ward admitted, "but that doesn't make things any easier around the tent."

"What would you suggest?"

"I thought maybe you might talk to him."

But Mr. Merritt shook his head.

"That wouldn't do, Ward."

"Why?"

"Because if Stretch is to win out this summer, we want him to do it all by himself. He's facing new conditions, meeting new people, and we want him to

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stand true to the test. The spirit of the camp, I think, will eventually have its way with him; but the best thing to do is to wait, Ward. We want Stretch to fight his own battle and, in the end, to stand on his own feet. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," Ward admitted. "Maybe," he added hopefully, "if he wins the tennis tournament, he'll change."

Mr. Merritt looked thoughtfully over the glittering water.

"Possibly," he said softly, "it might be better for Stretch to lose."

After they had returned to shore, Ward puzzled over the counselor's words. He could not quite understand why it would be better for Stretch not to win, unless Mr. Merritt meant that it would give him a chance to take defeat without whining. But Ward did not want Stretch to lose.

It had become clearly apparent, after the tennis tournament had passed its initial stage, that the best two players in the camp were Stretch and Rex Skillman. They had been placed in opposite sides of the draw, and, barring accidents, would meet in the final round. Ward, watching them at practice, rather favored Stretch to win, but there was no telling when his quick-tempered schoolmate might lose control of himself. It was probable, of course, that Stretch would come through the big test without wavering, but Ward was not entirely sure.

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He followed the course of the tournament with increasing misgivings. Stretch accounted for his semi-final match without much difficulty, and Rex Skillman, winning easily in the same round, turned to the other boy with shining eyes.

"No matter who wins the cup, Stretch," he said pleasantly, "at least we've earned the right to wear the camp insignia."

But there was no answering smile on Stretch's face.

"The insignia be hanged!" he said shortly. "What I'm after is the gold medal."

"You've got an even chance for it," Rex told him.

But Stretch did not answer, and Ward, watching him, shook his head doubtfully.

"One thing is certain," Ward remarked to Bill Barrett, "Stretch is acting like a two-year-old kid."

"Maybe he'll wake up," Bill answered. "He's a good scout at heart, you know."

"I'd like to see him win, of course," Ward said. "But sometimes I think that a good, lusty walloping is just what he needs."

They forgot about tennis, however, when on Friday afternoon the camp baseball team met Moonlight in the first of a series of three games. Only two of the members of tent 7 were on the team; but Curly Lockwood was captain and Bill Barrett first-string short-stop.

"The rest of us will be on the side lines yelling our heads off for you to win," Ward told them. "And

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we'll expect each of you to make at least two home runs and a triple."

"Curly's the Babe Ruth of the team," Bill answered.

"It doesn't matter who makes the runs, so long as we get them," Curly announced. His face grew serious. "We're going to win, of course," he added.

But Curly wasn't quite so confident as his words indicated. Sunrise had a fairly good team, but it was no world-beater, and Moonlight had already given Pinetree a hard battle.

"The championship of the lake lies between the three camps," Curly explained. "Last year we beat Pinetree in the final game and won the pennant, but they've got a pretty good pitcher this season—a Lawrenceville man—and we'll have to go some to win. This game to-day will give us a line on our chances."

"What happened in swimming last year?" Ward asked.

"Pinetree won the championship."

"But we didn't have Ward then," Stretch put in.

"No," Curly agreed.

They were silent for a moment. Curly Lockwood looked over at Ward and grinned; and their eyes met in friendly challenge. Two varsity captains—and on the success or failure of their teams depended to a great degree the winning of the Silver Cup.

But when, shortly before three o'clock, the entire camp walked over to the baseball diamond, there

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was no more loyal supporter of the Sunrise baseball nine than Ward Jackson.

"The camp comes first," he told himself stanchly, "and anything else doesn't matter at all."

The Moonlight rooters massed themselves on the left side of the diamond in back of third base; and while their team had the field, they cheered thunderously, with a fine show of confidence. There were only a half hundred or so of them, but they made up in enthusiasm what they lacked in numbers, and their players scooped up hard-grounders and smothered high-flies with surprising skill.

"They look pretty good to me," Stretch Magens announced. His eyes narrowed. "And it wouldn't hurt you at all, Ward, if they should happen to win."

"But they're not going to win," Ward answered evenly.

In the first inning, however, Moonlight scored two runs. Bill Orvis, pitcher of the Sunrise team, was wild, passing the first man to face him and hitting the second. The next batter struck out, but the visiting clean-up man smashed a double to right field which sent both runners over the plate.

"Good night!" Stretch remarked. "It's all over now but the shouting."

Orvis, however, settled down after that, and retired the side without further scoring. But the damage had already been done, and Sunrise found herself on the defensive, with the game barely begun.

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It was then that Curly Lockwood showed his qualities of leadership. He called his team around him, and although Ward could not hear what he was saying he knew that Curly was urging his men to renewed effort.

“We’ve got nine innings to catch up to them,” Ward said. “Watch us go, Stretch!”

But Stretch only smiled cynically; and Ward, watching him, was conscious again of a feeling of keen irritation. With set lips, he thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets and turned his attention to the game.

CHAPTER V

AND TENNIS

THE Moonlight pitcher proved to be a regular Christy Mathewson in disguise, and on their first three times at bat Sunrise did not get a single hit. Even Curly Lockwood was unable to solve the baffling delivery; and Ward, suddenly doubtful, began to consider the possibility of defeat.

On the field, however, the team fought back bravely. After that disastrous first inning, they had settled down to real baseball; Orvis had found himself and was pitching masterly balls, and the game promised to develop into a pitchers' battle. But the two runs which Moonlight had secured began to assume monstrous proportions.

Then, to make matters worse, Moonlight counted again in the fourth, and this time it was Bill Barrett who was responsible for the score. The first batter singled to right field, was advanced on a sacrifice, and took third on an infield hit which should have been an out. Then, with two men on base and a chance for a double play, Bill juggled a grounder just long enough to permit the man on third to dash triumphantly over the plate. The Moonlight rooters

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yelled joyfully, and gloom hung like a wet blanket over the Sunrise section.

But still the team fought back; and Curly Lockwood, refusing to be discouraged, exhorted his men to renewed efforts.

"They can't keep this up forever," he said, "and their pitcher's bound to crack sooner or later. Let's go!"

But three more innings passed, and still Sunrise failed to count a single run. Defeat hovered in the near distance, doubly tragic because of its unexpectedness.

"We're rotten," Stretch Magens declared disgustedly. "They've got it over us like a tent."

"Oh, give us a rest!" Rex Skillman mumbled.

Stretch looked up angrily, but said nothing.

"No team is ever beaten until the game's ended," Ward said.

But the sixth inning passed, and the seventh, and still Sunrise failed to score. When the eighth began, the specter of defeat drew nearer and smiled at them leeringly.

But just when things looked the blackest, the visiting pitcher showed signs of weakening. The first Sunrise batter to face him received a base on balls, stole second, and advanced to third on a neat sacrifice bunt. With a man on third and only one out, things began to look brighter. The Sunrise rooters woke up and called loudly for a score.

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“We’re going now,” Rex Skillman boomed out. “Let’s sew up the game right here.”

“Hencoop” Simmons, the Sunrise catcher, advanced to the plate determinedly, pounded his bat against the ground, and waited. On the first pitched ball he slammed a hit to left field which had all the earmarks of a home run. The spectators rose to their feet and yelled wildly.

The ball struck far in the outfield, bounded high, hit against a jutting rock, and bounced sideways, straight into the hands of the center-fielder, who had dashed over at the first impact. He threw quickly to the shortstop, but the runner slid into third ahead of the ball.

“Safe!” the umpire announced hoarsely.

Pandemonium broke loose among the Sunrise rooters. One run had already been scored and another was imminent.

“We’re off!” Ward yelled, and joined his own voice to the volume of cheering.

Bill Barrett, advancing to the plate, rested his bat against his shoulder, and waited. The visiting pitcher, obviously nervous, regarded him doubtfully; then, winding up, tried tempting him with a wide outshoot. But Bill let it go.

“Ball one!”

Ward Jackson shifted excitedly.

“That’s the eye, Bill!”

The pitcher wound up again and shot the ball like

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a streak toward the rubber. Bill, setting himself, met it cleanly for a solid smash over second base.

Another run!

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy!"

The Moonlight captain, sensing the fact that his team was in danger of "blowing up," called the infield around him for conference.

"Let's get together, men," he said, loudly enough for Ward to hear. "We've still got a one-run lead, and *we're going to keep it*. Remember, fellows, we're playing for Moonlight."

His words, gravely spoken, served to steady them; the pitcher nodded grimly.

"Let's go, men!"

Bill, obeying instructions of the coach, attempted to steal second base and was retired on a close decision. And, although the next Sunrise batter hit the ball high and far, a visiting outfielder smothered it, and the rally was ended.

But the game had suddenly taken on a rosier hue.

The Sunrise team trotted out to the field with renewed confidence. Sensing victory, they played like veterans; and although the first Moonlight batter smashed out a hit, he was left stranded on base when the three men following him tried vainly to connect with the ball.

Then the last half of the ninth began.

"We're one run behind," Ward announced excit-

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edly, "and their pitcher is just about through. Here's where we sew up the old ball game."

But Stretch Magens refused to enthuse.

"That hit last inning ought to have been a home run instead of a three bagger," he said. "Luck's against us."

Ward frowned into his glowing eyes.

"You old kill-joy!"

The rest of the Sunrise rooters, however, did not share in Stretch's pessimism. Advancing dangerously close to the baseline, they called loudly for victory.

Rah, rah, rah!

Ray, ray, ray!

SUNRISE!

Team, team, team!

The visiting pitcher glanced up nervously, plainly on edge.

"All off now for a big inning!" some one called.

"Oh, you team!"

Rex Skillman's eyes shone happily.

"Curly's up this inning," he said, "and he'll knock it a mile."

"Come on, team! Let's go!"

Ned Saunders, first up for Sunrise, sent a liner screeching toward the outfield. But the Moonlight shortstop, leaping high, speared the ball in his gloved hand for the most sensational catch of the game. The cheers of the Sunrise rooters froze in their throats.

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"What did I tell you?" Stretch Magens asked.

But the team refused to be discouraged. On the baselines the coaches chatted.

"A little luck there. Let's knock the next one a mile!"

The Moonlight pitcher, taking heart, faced the next batter confidently. Oblivious to the din of cheering, he put all that he had into the next three balls, and the batter struck out ignominiously.

"Two gone!" Ward said heavily—and gloom descended over the north side of the field.

"Shrimp" MacClary, star infielder of the Sunrise team, walked slowly to the plate, a sense of responsibility heavy upon him. With narrowed eyes he waited, while the spectators watched breathlessly, and the visiting pitcher, hitching up his trousers, turned anxiously to his infield.

"One more!" he called. "Just one!"

Ward Jackson, so nervous that he was unable to stand still, gripped Rex Skillman's shoulder with muscled fingers.

"We've got to do it."

"Looks pretty bad," Rex said.

But a moment later, Shrimp connected for a solid smash over second base; and when the wild burst of cheering which followed died away, he was standing grinningly on the initial sack.

"Come on!" he called. "Now's the time."

Ward Jackson waited breathlessly. The Sunrise

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left fielder selected a bat with infinite care, shuffled to the pan, and stood threateningly. The Moonlight players, pounding clenched fists into gloved hands, shifted nervously.

"One more!" their pitcher called again.

But on the first ball the batter knocked a single over shortstop. There were two out, two on base, and two runs needed to win. And the next batter was Curly Lockwood, captain of the Sunrise team.

"Oh, you Curly!" some one called.

"Gee!" Ward rasped. "Go to it, boy!"

Curly, his muscles taut, grasped his bat with desperate grip and pounded it against the rubber. The rooters of both teams relapsed into tense silence, awed by the crisis of the moment. But if Curly was nervous, he gave no indication of it. He waited quietly, his eyes clear, his hands steady.

"Put 'er over!" he challenged.

The Moonlight pitcher stood indecisively. Only a few minutes before, victory seemed fairly within his grasp; now a single mistake on his part would spell defeat. Before him stood the heaviest hitter on the Sunrise team—the captain. On one side of him, the members of the Sunrise camp hoped desperately for his downfall; on the other, his own supporters prayed silently for his triumph.

"Just one man!" he told himself. "Only one!"

The catcher signaled for an inshoot, and he nodded. But the pitch was a poor one.

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"Ball one!" the umpire called.

The spectators stirred restlessly.

"Make him pitch to you, Curly!"

Silence fell again as the visiting boxman wound up for the second time. The two men on bases shifted farther from the bags, hands extended, eyes alert. The ball shot forward, but Curly Lockwood made no move.

"Strike one!"

The Moonlight section cheered thunderously.

"That's showing them, old top!"

And still Curly waited, his lips in a straight line, his muscled fingers encircling the bat. The ball came forward again, and he swung desperately.

"Strike two!"

The visiting pitcher sighed relievedly.

"One more," he whispered. "Just one!"

He nodded in instant agreement as the catcher signaled for an outshoot. He had two balls to waste now, and Curly might possibly be tempted by one of them.

But the man at the plate waited stolidly, and the umpire threw up his left hand.

"Ball two!"

The pitcher decided on a straight one, shoulder high, but Curly made no attempt to hit at it.

"Ball three!"

"Yea!" some one called shrilly.

Both batter and pitcher realized that the crucial

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moment had come. Three balls and two strikes, two men on base, and a single run needed to tie the score! For a moment their eyes met. Curly tapped his bat against the plate.

One more!

The pitcher decided on an inshoot. It was his best chance. He hurled the ball forward with all the power of his muscled arm; and Curly Lockwood, following its swift flight, swung heavily.

The sharp crack of wood meeting leather punctuated the silence which hung over the diamond, and the ball sailed in a line toward right field. A wave of wild cheering swept from the Sunrise stands.

The fielder, turning, sprinted desperately, but the ball struck the ground while he was still ten yards away. Bounding, it rolled toward a clump of woods bordering the field.

The men on first and second, after a single glance, dug for home. The onlookers shrieked.

“A home run! A home run!”

But before Curly had reached third, the two runners before him had scored—and the game was won.

Sunrise 4, Moonlight 3.

Yelling almost hysterically, the boys of Sunrise rushed out upon the field, lifted the protesting Curly Lockwood to their shoulders and marched triumphantly around the diamond. Ward Jackson, taking part whole-heartedly in the general celebration, looked up into the other boy's beaming face and

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recognized Curly for what he was—the biggest man in camp. But Ward felt no envy, no jealousy. Curly was a good scout, a regular fellow, and he deserved the Silver Cup.

But later, Stretch Magens, joining Ward on the way back to the main part of the camp, smiled cynically.

“Curly will have a bigger swelled-head than ever now,” he declared.

Angry retort sprung to Ward’s lips, but he remained silent. Bill Barrett, however, frowned irritably.

“I sure do wish you’d get over your grouch.”

Stretch, however, was unusually silent that night; and the next morning, when the final match of the tennis tournament was held, he took his place on the court grimly, his eyes shining and his lips set in a straight line of determination.

“To look at him,” Ward said, “you’d think that the world was coming to an end unless he wins.”

But it seemed, after the match began, that Stretch’s chances of winning were anything but good. Apparently he had decided to play carefully and to depend upon Rex’s errors for his points, for his returns were soft, his stroking uncertain, and his generalship weak. With remarkable quickness, Stretch lost the first set, six to one; and as they changed courts for the beginning of the second set, he cast never a glance at his

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opponent, but settled himself stolidly and waited for the other boy to serve.

Practically the entire camp lined the two sides of the court, and although each player received his fair share of applause, it was noticeable that the sympathies of the majority of the spectators were with Rex Skillman. Stretch had not made himself especially popular during his few weeks at Sunrise.

But Stretch, ignoring the onlookers, centered his attention on the game, playing even more carefully as the match progressed, and losing successive games with astonishing rapidity. And as the prospects of victory grew dim, his thin face paled beneath its tan, and his dark eyes narrowed. He fought back, grimly, however, making no comment, offering no excuses. But he lost the second set, six to love.

"It's all over now but the shouting," Bill Barrett declared. "Stretch is way off form."

But Ward had not entirely lost hope.

"If he'll stop being so careful," he said, "and play the game he's capable of, he can win yet."

"Maybe we ought to tell him."

"I don't think so." Ward spoke slowly. "Stretch's our friend, of course, but so is Rex; and we're all members of the same tent."

"Probably you're right," Bill agreed. "But I wish Stretch would get going."

A small group of boys, believing the match as good as ended, strolled away from the courts in the direc-

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tion of the lake. And in so doing, they missed what was probably the finest exhibition of tennis that the camp had ever seen. For Stretch Magens, realizing that he could not win by purely defensive tactics, suddenly decided to cast caution to the winds and play the slashing, smashing game which had won him the championship at Hillsdale and brought him to the final match of the present tournament.

On Rex's service, Stretch slammed the ball in booming Lawfords to the back court, rushed eagerly to the net, and smothered his opponent's easy returns in neat chip-shots to the sidelines. On his own service, he kept to the back court until an opportunity to dash forward presented itself; and then, grimlipped, he hovered over the net, while Rex tried desperately, but without avail, to "pass" him.

In quick succession, Stretch won the first four games at love, dropped the fifth game after deuce had been called six times; and then, employing all the skill at his command, slammed his way to victory in the third set.

Rex Skillman, passing him as they changed courts, smiled into his glowing eyes.

"Good work! You sure did have me going."

But Stretch made no answer, and Ward, noticing the incident, felt vaguely ashamed.

"It's all right to win," he told himself with a touch of bitterness. "But the least that a fellow can do is to be a good sport about it."

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Stretch continued his relentless tactics in the fourth set; smashed the ball recklessly but with uncanny precision to the back court, dashed to the net at every opportunity, and counted point after point, until the match stopped being a contest and became a rout. But through it all, Rex Skillman played as best he could.

At the beginning of the final and decisive set, the spectators who had lingered knew that only a miracle could rob Stretch of the victory. For five games in a row, Stretch played beyond himself, overwhelming his opponent by the very ferocity of his attack. It was unbeatable tennis, and Rex bowed to the inevitable, although he fought back with all the skill at his command, his fighting instinct intact.

And then, in rushing cross-court for one of Rex's returns, the eager-eyed Stretch struck his foot against a small pebble, turned his ankle sharply, and, with a shrill cry of pain, pitched forward to the ground.

Ward Jackson, the first to reach him, lifted him to his feet again and regarded him anxiously.

"Hurt?"

Stretch winced in evident pain, sank down on the court and seized his ankle between gripping fingers.

"It isn't much," he said heavily. "It'll be all right in a minute."

Rex, jumping over the net, looked down at him sympathetically.

"We'll call it a day, if you want to, Stretch," he

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suggested. "We can finish out this set to-morrow."

But the other boy shook his head stubbornly, climbed to his feet and hobbled to position.

"Let's go," he announced between set lips. "I'm all right."

Rex waited doubtfully; and then, at the nod of the referee, served the ball swiftly. Stretch met it squarely, but when Rex returned it to the far corner, Stretch could not even touch it with his racket. The watching boys knew then that Stretch's chance of winning the tournament had passed. The score was five games to love in his favor, and the points forty to thirty; but an accident had robbed him of the victory that had been almost within his grasp.

"It's hard luck!" Ward said. "But Stretch is through."

But just when things looked blackest for Stretch, Rex Skillman did a curious thing. He served a double fault, which gave Stretch the precious point which meant victory—and the championship of the camp.

For a moment after the second ball had landed in the net, Stretch stood as one in a daze, his face impassive, his eyes wide with unbelief. And then, hobbling forward, he reached his hand over the net.

"Thanks!" he said.

Rex Skillman, accepting the outstretched hand, grinned into Stretch's wondering eyes.

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“You sure did show me up,” he declared. “And—congratulations!”

But Stretch, running grimy fingers through his ruffled hair, refused to let it stand at that.

“It was you, Rex,” he said quietly, “who showed me up for what I am—a bum sport.” Suddenly and unexpectedly, he smiled. “But now I’m through!” he answered. “And—and—thanks!”

Ward Jackson, watching, knew that Stretch Magens had found himself at last.

CHAPTER VI

OVER THE CLIFF

WARD JACKSON looked over at Stretch Magens in pleased approval.

“You sure have changed a lot in the last few days,” he announced bluntly. “What’s happened to the old grouch, anyhow?”

Stretch grinned, with a touch of embarrassment.

“It’s gone,” he said, “where the woodbine twineth.”

“Where’s your tennis medal?” Ward asked.

“In my pocket.”

“Let’s see it.”

Stretch drew it out almost reluctantly, holding it rather gingerly in the palm of his hand and regarding it thoughtfully.

“If I hadn’t been playing with a good deal better sport than I am,” he declared slowly, “this thing would belong to Rex Skillman instead of me.”

“Do you think he purposely missed that last point so that you could win?”

“I know he did, even though he won’t acknowledge it. He isn’t the kind of fellow to take advantage of an accident.”

Ward, remembering all the mean things that

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Stretch had said about Rex, decided to "rub it in" a little.

"But after all," he remarked dryly, "we can't get away from the fact that Rex is a highbrow."

Stretch's eyes flashed indignantly.

"Highbrow or not," he answered, "he's a regular guy, and sometime I'm going to pay him back."

Down on the lake, a dozen or more boys were paddling lazily in gleaming canoes, and from the direction of the baseball field came the chatter of many voices.

"Bill and I have been thinking of going over to Pinetree this morning," Ward announced suddenly. "We can get Tony there and take a long tramp back in the mountains."

Stretch's face clouded.

"With that roughneck!"

"Yes." Ward was silent for a moment. "Roughneck or not," he added significantly, "Tony's a regular guy."

Stretch, however, only snorted resentfully; and Ward, whittling on an old piece of wood he had found outside the tent, began to whistle softly.

Stretch's indifference was disappointing. Ward had thought that perhaps, in view of the lesson Rex Skillman had taught him, Stretch would realize that even a fellow like Tony was not without his good points, that he would drop his attitude of hostility

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and accept the quiet-voiced Italian as a friend. But Stretch, apparently, had decided otherwise.

"Tony's a good fellow," Ward said.

"He may be all right in his way," Stretch answered. "But I wish he wouldn't come around here so much."

"He's only been over two or three times."

"Even that's too many." Stretch's eyes were sullen. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if he hung around here just to spy on the swimming team."

"You're crazy," Ward told him. "Are you coming with us to-day or aren't you?"

"I'll think about it," Stretch answered. "But probably not."

But when, a half hour later, they set off for Pine-tree, Stretch announced that he had decided to go along with them.

"I'm tired of hanging around camp all the time," he explained. "What I'd like to have is a little excitement."

They started at eleven o'clock, taking two of the camp canoes; Stretch and Ward in one, and Bill Barrett and Rex Skillman in the other.

"It isn't such a very long paddle," Ward announced, "and we ought to get there before noon. Then Tony can pack a lunch and come along with us."

Stretch, in the bow of the canoe, said nothing, and for a long time they paddled in silence, each boy busy with his thoughts. Although Tony had paid several visits to Sunrise, they had never been to Pinetree,

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and Ward looked forward eagerly to an inspection of the rival camp.

"They have a good bunch of fellows over there," he said finally, "and I'm anxious to see the place."

"Probably," Stretch told him indifferently, "one camp is just about the same as another."

"There's only one difference," Ward qualified. "Sunrise is the best of all."

But Stretch only grunted, and they relapsed into silence again until, rounding a jutting ledge of rock, they came in sight of Pinetree.

"There it is," Rex Skillman called from his canoe. "And the gang are all in swimming."

As they drew nearer the shore, a group of boys on a long, wide float regarded them curiously. Pine-tree was located on a broad stretch of green fields, the tents set in a line about one hundred feet from the water and facing the baseball diamond and tennis courts. In the rear, rugged mountains towered over them.

"Some place!" Stretch admitted.

"But they haven't got anything on us."

As their canoes scraped against the edge of the dock, Tony Cuppola, who was in the water, recognized them.

"Hello!" he called, and scrambled to the float. "It is fine of you to come."

Two or three other boys joined Tony, who introduced them with grave formality—"Tex" Austin,

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captain of the baseball team; "Dutch" Lauer, the camp tennis champion, and Hal Thomas, the swimming captain.

"Glad to see you fellows over here," Austin told them. "We're rivals, of course, but that shouldn't prevent us from being friends."

"We just dropped in to take Tony with us on a trip up the mountains," Ward explained. "Think you can spare him?"

The other boy regarded Tony affectionately.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said. "Tony, you know, is one of the strongest boosters for Pinetree, and you fellows might corrupt him."

"I don't think there's much danger of that."

"No," Tony said.

Hal Thomas looked over at Ward curiously.

"You're the swimming captain, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," Ward answered.

"A long-distance man?"

"Yes."

The rival captain smiled.

"You've got a good man to beat. Tony's our star, you know."

"So I've heard." Ward smiled easily. "But if I have to be beaten, I'd just as leave have Tony do it as any one else."

Stretch Magens snorted, but the Pinetree captain nodded gravely.

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"That's about the way the fellows around here think of him," he said.

A slow wave of crimson suffused Tony's face, but his eyes were shining.

"The boys here," he announced quietly, "have been very good to me."

"And you've been good to us." Hal Thomas turned to the visitors. "You fellows like to take a swim?"

"I guess not," Bill Barrett answered. "We're anxious to get started. How about it, Tony, like to come along?"

"Very much," the Italian boy answered.

"Hurry it up then," Stretch put in.

While Tony went over to the camp kitchen for his lunch, they talked of many things; of the baseball game with Moonlight, of the prospects of Sunrise and Pinetree fighting it out for the swimming championship, of tennis and camp rules.

"Curly Lockwood will win your silver cup again, I suppose," Tex Austin suggested. "Most of us know him from last year, and he sure is a regular guy."

"He'll win it," Stretch answered, "unless Ward here beats him out. It's between the two of them now."

The Pinetree boys looked up critically.

"If you can beat Curly," Austin said, "you must be *there*."

"I haven't a chance in the world," Ward assured

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him. He turned the talk to Tony. "How is he making out over here?"

"Fine! It was a little hard for him at first, but he came through in great shape."

"I knew he would," Ward said.

"But he's a Wop," Stretch protested.

"That doesn't make any difference with us." It was Hal Thomas speaking. "And he can swim like a fish."

"If it hadn't been for Ward, he wouldn't be swimming at all," Stretch announced.

"How's that?"

"Ward saved his life on the way up here. Dived off a Hudson River boat after him."

Hal Thomas nodded.

"I remember now that Tony said something about it." He turned to Ward smilingly. "Then, if we beat you in the swimming meet, some of the credit will have to go to you."

"If you beat us," Ward answered.

Tony, returning, announced that he was ready to start.

"Come again and make a regular visit of it," Tex Austin told them. "And be sure to take good care of Tony."

"We'll do that," Ward promised. "So-long, you men!"

"So-long!"

They pushed their canoes off the float, waved pleas-

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antly, and followed the shore of the lake toward Scudder's Inlet.

"We'll hit the trail up to the ridge of Mount Tainter," Ward announced, when they had landed, "and then follow the cliffs along the river."

"And just before lunch we'll take a swim somewhere," Rex added. He turned to Tony curiously. "You're on the Pinetree team, aren't you?"

"Yes," Tony answered. "I am a long-distance swimmer."

"You'll probably race against Ward then, when we have our meet."

Tony's face clouded.

"Yes, Mr. Ward and I will probably be—rivals."

"Mr. Ward," Stretch put in dryly, "will probably make you look like a canal boat."

Tony looked up doubtfully, as if he did not quite understand.

"From the reports I've heard," Ward announced, "Tony's likely to wallop the tar out of me."

"If I do," Tony answered quietly, "it will be because I want to win for my camp."

"Like it over there?"

Tony's face lighted, and his eyes shone.

"I—I—it is great!"

The path grew steeper after a time, so that they were forced to save their breath, and conversation languished. But they came finally to the summit of the mountain, where they sank down relievedly and

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looked with a touch of wonder over the panorama of undulating hills which stretched before them.

"Maybe," Stretch suggested, "we can find a cliff to climb down. I'd like to try some real stunts for once."

"And break your neck probably," Ward answered. "I never was terribly crazy about high places."

"Neither was I," Tony admitted. "I would be afraid to climb down a cliff."

Stretch, looking over at him, snorted contemptuously.

"Let's get on," he suggested, "and find a place to swim."

On the far side, toward the north, the mountain grew more rugged, and for a time they followed a rocky ledge which dropped abruptly to a deep, narrow stream which wound its way through a channel of sheer rock. Stretch Magens, his eyes shining, was in his element. Oblivious to danger, he leaped easily from rock to rock, occasionally leaned over to examine the side of the gorge, and finally called a halt.

"This," he announced, "is just the kind of place I've been looking for. And I'm going to climb down."

The others looked over at him doubtfully, and Tony Cuppola's face went white.

"Oh, don't do it!" he protested. "You may fall and hurt yourself."

But the words served only to strengthen Stretch's resolution.

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"I dare you to follow me," he challenged.

Tony drew back fearfully.

"I'm afraid," he answered. "It's dangerous."

"You're crazy to try such a thing, Stretch," Bill Barrett put in. "Let's eat our lunch."

But Stretch shut his lips stubbornly.

"Any of you fellows going to come with me?" he demanded.

"No," Ward said. He felt that Stretch was about to do a foolish thing, but he knew that opposition only angered the other boy, and he could think of no way to stop him. "Why not wait until after we eat?" he temporized.

But Stretch, without answering, walked to the edge of the cliff and let himself over carefully. Then his eyes sought Tony's.

"I dare you to come!"

"No," Tony told him quietly.

"See you later," Stretch said, and began his perilous descent.

Face downward upon the top of the ledge, the other boys watched him anxiously. The cliff was a steep one, almost perpendicular, but occasionally hardy bushes jutted out from between hanging rocks, and the uneven surface gave many footholds. An experienced mountain climber could probably have made it without much difficulty, but Stretch was a novice; and although his courage was unquestioned, his skill was hardly equal to the task, and he realized, before

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he was half-way to the river, that he had made a mistake. He refused to give up, however, and with set lips and eyes which held just a trace of fear, he picked his way carefully from bush to bush.

It appeared to the watching boys above him as if he was going to make it. He had gone two-thirds of the way without accident, and the worst part of the journey seemed to have been passed. But suddenly, when he was still twenty feet or so from the bottom, a bush which he had grasped refused to bear his weight and gave way unexpectedly. Stretch, losing his balance, reached desperately for a jutting ledge, missed it, and then, with a shrill cry, half rolled and half fell down the side of the cliff.

His body, gaining swift momentum, scraped along ragged edges of sharp rocks, struck with a dull thud against a narrow ledge directly over the water, rolled over once, and then came to a halt. One hand dropped lifelessly into the cold water of the mountain stream; and Stretch, motionless, lay balanced perilously on the smooth slab of stone, in momentary danger of falling into the swiftly surging water of the river.

The boys above him had risen to their feet and were regarding one another with fear-filled eyes. Ward Jackson was the first to speak.

"He's unconscious," Ward rasped. "And if he falls into the water, he'll probably drown."

"We've got to get down to him."

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“Yes.”

“But how?”

There was a moment of tense silence; then Ward spoke again.

“The only way,” he announced, trying to speak calmly, “is to go back along the cliff for about a half mile. We can get down to the river there, and follow the bank upstream.”

“But Stretch might fall off at any moment.”

“It’s the only thing to do, though.”

For a few seconds they waited, a sense of futility heavy upon them. Then:

“Let’s go,” Bill Barrett said, and led the race along the ledge in the direction of the spot downstream where they could descend the cliff.

But Tony Cuppola remained where he was. He was dazed by the tragedy he had just witnessed, and his mind worked slowly. But one thing he knew: that Stretch Magens lay helpless at the foot of the cliff, and that at any moment he might shift his position and tumble into the water from the slab of rock which held his unconscious body. It would take at least twenty minutes for Ward and the others to reach him—and twenty minutes were too long a time to wait.

White-faced, and with his heart thumping like a hammer against his ribs, Tony decided to scale the cliff after Stretch. He was frightened, so frightened that for a full half minute he stood without moving fighting down the fear which threatened to overcome

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him. Then, his mind clearing, he crept to the edge of the cliff, and let himself over.

Sixty feet below, the sound of rushing water drifted up to him, and the roar of it silenced for a moment the frightened beating of his heart. Forgetful of himself, thinking only of the motionless figure balanced above the river, he flattened his body against the face of the cliff and began his slow descent. Foot by foot, testing each new support before he relinquished the old one, grasping the roots of scraggy bushes, the edge of jutting rocks, he felt his way toward the goal. He kept his eyes straight before him, not daring to look down, telling himself over and over again that there was no danger, that he had only to keep his head, to refrain from thinking of anything but Stretch, to accomplish his purpose.

There was no one to watch his heroic attempt at rescue, no one to shout words of encouragement, or to cheer him on. If he should fall, his body would probably roll to the river, be carried downstream—to oblivion. Or maybe Ward Jackson and the others would discover him. . . .

He shook his head almost angrily at the thoughts which forced their way into his mind.

“I must go on,” he said, speaking in Italian, his natural language, “and think of nothing else but Stretch.”

It did not occur to him that his action was doubly heroic in view of the continued hostility which Stretch

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Magens had manifested toward him. All that he knew, or cared to know, was that a human life was in danger, and that he was in a position to help. And never once did he consider the possibility of turning back; in spite of the fear which gripped him, he resolved, calmly and courageously, to see the thing through, no matter what the cost.

So he kept on, his hands torn by contact with the sharp rocks, his shirt ripped in places, his canvas-covered feet cut and bruised. He felt his way slowly, with infinite care, not daring to look down, chafing over the slowness of his progress, yet realizing the danger of undue haste.

He was conscious, after a time, of an increasingly strong temptation to take a single look downward, to assure himself that Stretch was still safe upon the ledge. Momentarily forgetful, he dropped his eyes, glimpsing the rushing river below. Sudden nausea overcame him, so that his foot slipped, and for a second or two he hung in mid-air, only his tenacious hold upon the roots of a bush preventing him from falling. He kicked around wildly until his feet found solid support again; and then, suddenly faint, he clung to the side of the cliff and waited, while his breath came sharply and the beating of his heart drowned out all other sound. For a minute or two he steadied himself, and then, urged by the necessity for action, he resumed his journey, more slowly this time, more deliberately.

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He knew instinctively that he had finally reached the spot from which Stretch had fallen. The river, he realized then, was hardly twenty feet below him, and he decided to risk another glance downward. His eager eyes discovered instantly the figure of Stretch Magens, and he breathed a silent prayer of thankfulness as he realized that Stretch had not moved. But he was still balanced perilously on the ledge, and even now, if he should shift his position. . . .

Very calmly, his fear suddenly gone, Tony measured the distance to the river. Directly below Stretch was a wide pool, apparently of safe depth.

"If I should jump," Tony thought, "I would save climbing over the worst part of the cliff, and—and I would get to him sooner. It's better that way, I think."

The ledge on which he stood was wide enough to permit him to turn around in safety. Tony, bracing his back against the rock, waited just for a moment, and then, springing far out, jumped toward the pool below. His body struck the water with a loud splash, and came to the surface a second later. Shaking his head, he struck out for the spot where Stretch Magens lay. And just as he reached the ledge, Stretch opened his eyes, groaned softly, shifted his position, and slipped noiselessly into the dark water.

But as he fell, Tony Cuppola was awaiting him.

CHAPTER VII

STRETCH MAKES A DECISION

TONY CUPPOLA had gone home, and the five tent mates were sitting on the dock at Sunrise Camp. Ward Jackson had just told the story of Stretch's rescue to the wide-eyed Curly Lockwood.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather," Ward concluded. "It took us longer than we thought to get back to Stretch; and when we finally reached the spot, there was Tony sitting on the ledge with Stretch's head in his lap, both of them soaking wet, and the cut on Stretch's forehead neatly bound up with a strip from Tony's shirt."

"If Tony hadn't climbed down the cliff, you fellows would have been too late, wouldn't you?" Curly asked.

"Yes, by ten minutes."

"What did Tony say about it?"

"Not a blamed thing." It was Stretch Magens who spoke. "When I tried to thank him, he only smiled, and said that he hadn't done any more than Mr. Ward did for him."

"He saved your life, though."

"Yes. And—and he showed me up, too."

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“How?”

“I’ve been calling him a roughneck and things like that, and then he comes along and risks his own life for mine.” Stretch was silent for a moment. “I guess,” he added, after a time, “that roughnecks are just as good as any one else.”

“And highbrows, too,” Ward suggested.

Stretch raised his head and looked directly into Rex Skillman’s quiet eyes.

“Yes,” he agreed.

“Let’s swim,” Rex said.

They dove off together into the sun-bathed water of the lake; all except Stretch, whose cut head had been carefully dressed by the camp physician and who had been forbidden to enter the water or take part in any athletics for a period of three weeks. But even though his absence would weaken the swimming team, Captain Ward Jackson was satisfied, for he felt that the experience through which Stretch had gone was more important even than victory.

Ward was anxious, though, to go through the season without defeat, and when Sunrise won from Millford on the following Saturday, he was perhaps the happiest boy in camp.

“It’s a good thing for you that we won,” Stretch told him later in the day. “If you can captain an undefeated swimming team, your chances for the Silver Cup will be just so much stronger.”

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But Ward only grinned.

"I'm not thinking of the Silver Cup," he said.

Deep down in his heart, however, he admitted that he would like to win it; not so much for the cup itself as for what it represented. The baseball team was doing well, had lost only one game out of five, and had already defeated Pinetree. And Curly Lockwood, the captain, was, of course, one of the outstanding figures of the camp. But if the swimming team could win *all* its meets. . . .

Ward shook his head almost angrily.

"The best thing for me to do is to forget it," he told himself grimly.

But he found, as the days passed on, that the awarding of the Silver Cup became an increasingly interesting topic among the boys at the camp; and he knew, after the swimming team had defeated Moonlight, that he was frequently mentioned as a possible winner.

"It's between you and Curly Lockwood," Bill Barrett told him once. "But Curly won it last year, and if we can beat Pinetree in swimming, you'll have the edge, I think."

"It won't matter," Ward answered. "But I sure would like to beat Pinetree, just the same."

The rival camp, however, had an exceptionally strong team, and the meet promised to be a close one. But against Moonlight, Sunrise had made the better

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showing; and, barring accidents, Ward was fairly confident of victory.

The meet was scheduled to be held on the last Saturday afternoon of the season; and on Friday evening, directly after supper, Ward called the members of the team together for final conference.

"We'll go over to the beach," he announced, when they had all gathered on the float, "build a big fire, and try to dope out the results of the different events to-morrow."

Mr. Merritt, who, as coach of the team, was present at the conference, smiled into Ward's solemn eyes.

"I had some of the younger boys stack wood this afternoon," he said. "And the fire is all ready to be lighted."

"Let's go!"

Pushing and jostling, they hurried to the shore-end of the jutting pier and arranged themselves in a small semicircle on the white sand of the beach. Ward, applying a match to the carefully prepared mound of timber, waited until the licking flames pierced the gathering darkness, and then turned to his fellow members.

"Men," he said, and there was a ringing quality to his voice which was in itself an inspiration, "this is the last night that we'll be together as members of the swimming team. To-morrow, we face our final test, our big test; but I feel that if each of us gives the best that he has for Sunrise, we'll win the cham-

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pionship of the lake. The camp expects us to win, and we must not disappoint them.”

It was a long speech for Ward to make, and he felt, as he stood in the glow of the roaring fire, that he had not said exactly what he intended to say. But the other members of the team were visibly impressed, and Curly Lockwood cleared his throat huskily.

“You can count on all of us to give everything that we have,” he stated quietly.

Ward nodded.

“Yes,” he answered, “we can count on that.”

After a moment of silence, Rex Skillman spoke.

“How do the prospects look?” he asked.

“Pretty good! There are ten events,” Ward explained, “and this afternoon the Pinetree captain came over to arrange the program.”

“What is it?”

“I’ve got it here.”

Ward pulled a sheet of paper from his sweater pocket and read slowly:

- “1. 50-yard dash.
2. Plunge for distance.
3. 150-yard breaststroke.
4. 200-yard relay.
5. Junior 100-yard swim.
6. 100-yard breaststroke.
7. 220-yard swim.

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8. 100-yard swim.
9. Fancy dive.
10. 440-yard swim."

"How do the points count?" some one asked.

"Five for first and three for second, except in the relay. The winning team in that event gets eight and the losing team nothing."

"That makes a total of eighty points," Stretch put in. "We've got to get over forty to win the meet."

"Can we do it?"

"We sure can." Ward spoke grimly, and his clean-cut jaw was even squarer than ever. "We're putting both Stretch and Rex in the fifty and one hundred, and we expect at least ten points in those two events. Fat Harper is going to win the plunge, and the Junior hundred and breaststroke look easy."

"How about the longer distances?"

"We'll put Curly in the 220 and me in the quarter."

There was a moment of silence, then:

"You'll have your work cut out for you to beat this fellow Cuppola in the four-forty," Fat Harper said.

"I know it," Ward agreed. "Against Moonlight, his time was seven seconds faster than mine."

"He's some swimmer," Rex Skillman put in. "And if he beats you, Ward, we'll have to make it up in some other race."

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“Yes.”

No one spoke for a time. The fire had spent its early fury, and was now glowing redly, an occasional dart of purple flame leaping from the smoldering ashes. The lake before them was half hidden in gathering shadow, blotting out the mountains on the opposite shore. Behind them, on the sloping hillside, the semicircle of brown tents stood like motionless sentinels; and occasionally a shrill voice broke in upon the silence which encompassed them.

Stretch Magens, sitting cross-legged on the sand, ventured a glance at Rex Skillman. Stretch, who had learned a number of things during the past few weeks, found himself suddenly glad that he had come to the Sunrise Camp. A wave of affection for the camp itself and for the members of the swimming team swept over him. Without conscious impulse, he found himself recalling the words of Mr. Merritt on that first day of the season: “And now, as members of the Sunrise Camp, it is up to us to stand true to the traditions which have been handed down to us; to cherish its good name, to uphold its standards, and to fight everlastingly for the honor of the camp.”

“Gee!” Stretch said.

“What’s that?” Ward asked.

“Nothing.”

They relapsed again into silence, feeling no necessity for words. Stretch Magens, unaccountably at peace with all the world, felt within him a growing

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desire to prove his worth as a member of Sunrise, to do something big, something generous—to atone, in a way, for his attitude of the early days. And as he sat there in the waning light of the fire, a sudden idea came to him as a possible means of atonement.

The winners in each of the events the next day would, he knew, be awarded gold medals. His own medal, which he had won in the tennis tournament, had been given him solely through the generosity of Rex Skillman. Rex, whom he at first scorned as a conceited highbrow, had done a big thing—for him.

“And now,” Stretch asked himself eagerly, “why can’t I do the same kind of thing for Rex by letting him win one of the races to-morrow?”

He was, he realized, a faster swimmer than the other boy; in the first meet with Millford he had won both the fifty and one-hundred yard events without much difficulty. But he had been out of practice for three weeks, and if he chose to let Rex finish first in the longer race, no one would be the wiser. And Rex would get the medal, and his own debt would be paid.

With shining eyes, Stretch turned to Ward Jackson.

“You’re expecting Sunrise to win both the fifty and hundred, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” Ward answered, “we’re counting on at least ten points in those two races.”

“Think we can beat the Pinetree entries?”

“One of you ought to. Why?”

“I was just asking,” Stretch said.

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Two or three of the other boys stirred restlessly.

"How about getting back?"

"No need of staying here, I suppose," Ward agreed. "Anything to say, Mr. Merritt?"

"I guess not." The older man stood up. "Only this: that in victory or defeat to-morrow, we must all play fair and square, and remember that the camp comes first."

The camp comes first! Stretch Magens, lying wide-eyed upon his cot, while his tent mates slept quietly beside him, wondered vaguely if, by permitting Rex to win one of the races the next afternoon, he would not be putting himself before Sunrise. Supposing, for instance, that one of the Pinetree entries should be faster than Rex! What would happen then? Rex would not get his medal, after all, and Sunrise would lose some precious points, might even lose the meet itself.

"But a thing like that couldn't happen," Stretch muttered stubbornly. "Both Rex and I are faster than the men we're going to swim against."

Nevertheless, he found it hard to get to sleep. He wanted Sunrise to win the meet; the spirit of the camp had now worked its way into his veins until it was an integral part of him. Sunrise was *his* camp, deserving of his best. They mustn't lose to-morrow, they mustn't lose!

It wouldn't be fair to Ward Jackson for them not to win, Stretch reflected. Ward, as captain of the

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team, was in line for the Silver Cup. And Stretch wanted him to get it. Ward was a good scout, a prince!

Stretch turned restlessly, so that the cot squeaked.

"Dog-gone it!" he said.

He fell, finally, into troubled slumber, dreaming of Rex Skillman and Tony Cuppola, and a race that was endless. But when he awoke the next morning, his indecision was gone.

"I'm going to let Rex Skillman win the hundred," he said. "He did a big thing for me, and it's up to me to pay him back."

The morning dragged along monotonously. On Monday the camp would break up, and most of the boys spent an hour or two in packing their belongings and getting ready for departure. An atmosphere of tense expectancy, of suppressed excitement, hovered over the tents; Sunrise had already beaten Pinetree in baseball, and a swimming victory was needed to make the summer complete.

The members of the team, trying hard to conceal their nervousness, wandered about in languid groups, reviewing the order of events, figuring critically on torn sheets of paper, hoping to win, looking forward to winning, and yet fearful of the unexpected. At luncheon, they ate sparingly, conscious of the anxious glances of the other boys.

But the worst was over when, at two o'clock, Pine-tree descended upon them in a body. The arrival of

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the opposing team was a tangible thing, something they were able to cope with.

“Let’s get dressed,” Ward ordered, “and be down to the float in fifteen minutes.”

They donned their bathing suits hurriedly, and Stretch noticed, with a touch of anger, that his hands were shaking.

“Brace up,” Ward told him. “After all, whether we win or lose, the world will go on just the same.”

“I want to win,” Stretch answered, “and I want you to get the Silver Cup.”

“Forget it!”

At the float, they found the Pinetree team awaiting them. Hal Thomas, the rival captain, greeted Ward smilingly.

“Everything’s arranged, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“How about starting, then?”

“We’re ready.”

One of the smaller boys, strutting importantly, raised a scarlet megaphone to his lips.

“All out for the fifty-yard dash!”

Stretch Magens and Rex Skillman, slipping off their sweaters, advanced nervously to the edge of the float.

The big meet with Pinetree was about to begin.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST EVENT

AT the crack of the gun, Stretch dove cleanly into the unruffled water of the outdoor pool. As the bodies of the four contestants came to the surface, Stretch was slightly in the lead. At the far end, he turned skillfully, increasing his advantage, holding it until, amid the thunderous cheers of the Sunrise followers, he touched the finish line a winner by a clean four feet.

Climbing happily to the float, he rested for a moment, while Rex Skillman, breathing heavily, turned shining eyes to his.

“Congratulations!”

“How did *you* make out?”

“Third,” Rex said. “Just out of the running.”

Stretch nodded grimly.

“Your chance will come later.”

But the other boy only smiled.

“I couldn’t win the hundred in a thousand years.”

The shrill voice of the announcer sounded again.

“All out for the plunge!”

Sunrise had only one entry in that event, but Fat Harper was good for over fifty-five feet, and they

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expected him to win. He lived up to expectations, floating almost to the sixty-foot mark and adding another five points to the Sunrise score.

Ward Jackson, aiding him in his laborious climb to the float, pounded him happily upon the back.

“Oh, you Fat!”

“The score,” Curly Lockwood announced, “is now ten to six. It’s going to be easy, Ward.”

“Sure does look that way!”

But Pinetree had a surprise in store in the breast-stroke. Ward had counted upon Jim Nelson, the Sunrise ace, to score at least three points; but the two rival swimmers were unexpectedly good, and in a driving finish, they managed to shut Jim out by a matter of inches.

Ward, his eyes suddenly somber, frowned disappointingly.

“What do you know about that?”

“That gives them a four-point lead,” Stretch declared soberly. “We—we’ve got to win the relay.”

“We sure do.”

From the Sunrise rooters massed along the shore sounded the “short yell” of the camp:

“Rah-rah-rah!

Rah-rah-rah!

SUNRISE!”

Ward turned eagerly to the four members of the relay team.

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"Let's go now! And give everything that we've got—all of us!"

They nodded grimly, and Rex, first of the Sunrise swimmers, crouched on the edge of the float, his body tense.

The gun barked.

Rex finished his fifty yards two feet in the rear, but Stretch Magens, taking up the burden on the second lap, overcame the handicap, and gave Curly Lockwood a yard advantage. Curly, fairly lifting himself through the water with a short-armed, powerful stroke, increased the lead by another foot; and after that, it was all over but the shouting. Amid the din of a hundred lusty voices, Ward swam the last fifty yards in twenty-six seconds and touched the float a winner by a clear five feet.

It was Stretch Magens who lifted him from the water; a shining-eyed Stretch who hugged him joyously and threatened to squeeze the last remnants of breath from his heaving chest.

"That's the boy, Ward!" some one called.

Curly Lockwood grasped his hand joyfully.

"Eight more points for Sunrise! And that puts us in the lead again."

Tony Cuppola, grave of face, confronted Ward wistfully.

"For my camp I am sorry, Mr. Ward," he said quietly. "But for you, I am glad."

Ward grinned into his serious eyes.

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"The meet's young, Old Sober-sides," he declared. "And your chance comes later, you know."

"My chance," Tony answered steadily, "to win—for Pinetree."

As the other boy turned away, Ward looked after him curiously.

"Tony sure does think a lot of his camp," he reflected.

But there was little time for Tony just then; for the announcer had already given his call for the hundred-yard junior swim, and four contestants, all under fifteen years of age, had advanced to the edge of the float. Ward, walking over to them, grinned reassuringly at the two eager youngsters who represented Sunrise.

"Go to it, fellows," he said. "And let's roll up the score."

They nodded gratefully, grew suddenly tense at the word of the starter, and dove desperately at the sound of the gun. But the race, after the first two laps, developed into a walkaway for Billy Atkinson, the Sunrise star; and although Pinetree managed to finish second, another five points was added to the home team's score.

"It's all over now," Stretch declared happily. "Only a miracle can beat us."

"What is the score, anyhow?" Curly demanded.

"Twenty-three to seventeen," Ward answered. "Let's go!"

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There was a slight delay before the hundred-yard backstroke; and Stretch Magens, waiting impatiently, ran muscled fingers through his ruffled hair and told himself relievedly that things were going to come out all right, after all. For one-half of the program had already been completed, and Sunrise was safely in the lead.

"No matter what I do in the hundred-yard swim," he told himself, "Sunrise is going to win."

His assurance grew stronger after the next event, which "Skinny" Leonard won by a scant six inches. But he won, nevertheless, adding five more points to the growing total, while the shouting boys on the bank pounded one another on the back and sent the "long yell" ringing over the quiet waters.

"It's as easy," Stretch said, "as falling off a log."

"The score," Ward told him, "is twenty-eight to twenty, and only four events to go. But you'd better win the hundred, just to sew things up."

"The two-twenty comes first," Stretch answered. Suddenly, his eyes grew thoughtful. "Come over to the end of the float," he directed. "I want to say something to you."

When they had drawn away from the others, Ward turned curiously.

"What's up?"

"Nothing much." Stretch hesitated a moment. "I was going to suggest," he explained finally, "that you

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go in the two-twenty yourself and keep Curly for the quarter."

"Why that?"

"You can win the shorter distance, but you haven't got such a good chance against Tony in the quarter. And you ought to win, Ward, if—if you want to get the Silver Cup."

Ward's eyes clouded.

"Do you mean," he asked quietly, "for me to make Curly swim against Tony, so that he'll be beaten?"

"Something like that," Stretch admitted.

Ward Jackson turned fairly to the boy beside him.

"Just between the two of us, Stretch," he asked quietly, "you wouldn't respect me much if I did a thing like that, would you?"

A slow wave of crimson crept across Stretch Magens' sun-browned face.

"I—I want you to win the Silver Cup."

"But not that way."

For a moment, the eyes of the two boys met, and then Stretch looked away.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it was for you, Ward."

"I know! But let's forget it, Stretch."

When they rejoined the others, the two-twenty had already started. Curly Lockwood, swimming easily, held the lead, reaching the first turn a yard in advance of his three opponents, increasing his advantage in each succeeding length of the pool, until, when he began the final twenty yards, there was no doubt of

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the outcome. And even though a Pinetree boy finished second, the joy among the Sunrise rooters was wholehearted and unconfined.

Ward Jackson, the first to reach Curly after his victory, held out a calloused hand.

“Good stuff!” he said. “Good stuff!”

As their grips met, the sound of thunderous cheering enveloped them.

“Rah, ray, ray!

Rah, rah, rah!

Bow, wow, wow!

Sunrise!

Lockwood, *Lockwood*, LOCKWOOD!”

“I hope,” Curly said evenly, “that they give the same yell for you at the end of the quarter, Ward.”

Their hands fell apart, and Ward, still smiling, walked over to where Stretch Magens was getting ready for the next event. He had sensed in that cheer the death-knell of his own hopes for the Silver Cup, but he did not mind. That is, not very much! For Curly Lockwood was a real man; and after all, it was what a fellow did rather than what he won that counted.

Stretch, his eyes shining, grinned happily.

“That makes the score thirty-three to twenty-three,” he announced. “And we’re going to come through, Ward, we’re going to come through.”

“Eight more points,” Ward told him, “will win the

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meet. And we're counting on you, Stretch, to get five of them."

"On me or Rex," Stretch answered.

There was something in the way he spoke which caused Ward to glance up curiously; but Stretch's face was impassive, and at the word of the announcer he hurried over to the starting line.

"Stretch acts as if he's got something up his sleeve," Ward told himself doubtfully. "But it won't matter much, one way or the other."

Stretch, meeting Rex Skillman at the edge of the float, unexpectedly held out his hand.

"Let's shake on it, Rex."

Nodding, the other boy gripped Stretch's muscled palm.

"May the best man win!"

"The best man is right," Stretch answered; and waited tensely for the gun.

He felt, as soon as they struck the water, that he was a better swimmer than the two Pinetree entries. For the first length of the pool, he set the pace, half turned toward Rex, who swam easily beside him. After the turn, however, he dropped back, permitting his team-mate to take the lead, content to let Rex have his way. A few feet behind him, the visiting swimmers splashed through the water, one of them already outdistanced.

As they turned again at the float, Ward Jackson leaned far over and called out hoarsely:

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“Hit it up, Stretch, hit it up!”

But Stretch had already made his decision, and he had no intention of changing it. Sunrise was ten points in the lead, and only three events remained. The meet was as good as won, and he had a debt to pay. Swimming easily, he watched Rex Skillman with critical eyes, and decided that Rex was good enough to win.

On the last turn, he noted that the best Pinetree entry was still more than two yards in the rear, an apparently hopeless handicap to overcome in a single length of the pool. Himself unwearied, knowing that he had only to give added impetus to his strokes to win, Stretch smiled grimly and remained a foot or two behind his laboring team-mate. When he was still forty feet or more from the finish line, he raised his head slightly and glanced backward. The Pine-tree swimmer was apparently as far behind as ever, and Stretch, satisfied that he was no longer a factor in the race, gave his attention to Rex Skillman.

Rex, fighting his way forward, crept slowly toward the spot where Ward Jackson stood with cupped hands, yelling something unintelligible. Stretch, his own arms flailing, half closed his eyes in an assumed agony of effort and drew almost even to his struggling team-mate. The crowd roared hoarsely, and Ward waved his arms in sudden fearful warning.

But Stretch was not looking at Ward. The race

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had been an easy one for him; he was free from the weariness which usually possessed him at the end of a gruelling contest, and his mind was working clearly. Convinced that the Pinetree entries had no chance, he was conscious only of a feeling of exaltation, of grim satisfaction that he had been man enough to do a big thing and pay back the debt that he owed to Rex.

Glancing up, he glimpsed the edge of the float hardly six feet in front of him. Rex Skillman, weakening rapidly, made a last despairing effort, buried his head in the rough water of the pool and drove his aching body forward. Stretch, less than a foot behind, raised his own hand and held it suspended until Rex, with a sigh of infinite relief, grasped the float and hung on pantingly. Beside him, Stretch looked into his glowing eyes, and grinned.

“Congratulations!” he said. “You won the race, Rex.”

The other boy nodded dazedly, and his parted lips whispered something which Stretch could not hear. From the direction of the Pinetree rooters sounded the thunder of hoarse cheering, and Stretch turned questioningly. The announcer, megaphone unlifted, addressed the crowd upon the bench:

“Results of the hundred-yard swim: first, Reynolds of Pinetree; second, Skillman, of Sunrise; time, one minute and seven seconds!”

A volume of lusty cheers greeted the announce-

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ment; and Stretch Magens' face went suddenly pale. He climbed excitedly to the float and confronted Ward Jackson with flashing eyes.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Didn't Rex win the race?"

Ward shook his head stolidly.

"He led until the last two yards," he answered. "Then Reynolds came even and beat him by inches."

"And—and Rex won't get the medal?"

"No."

Stretch's face clouded, and his fists clenched impotently at his sides.

"I—I—," he stammered. "I thought Rex was going to win."

He was conscious of Ward's suspicious gaze, but he did not care.

"You poor boob!" Ward said, and there was a hint of affection and something akin to respect in his honest blue eyes. "I understand now."

"Understand what?"

"That you tried to give Rex the medal so as to pay him back for that tennis match."

"But instead," Stretch answered miserably, "I only lost the race for Sunrise."

"It won't matter," Ward told him reassuringly. "The score's thirty-six to twenty-eight, and we're sure of a first place in the dive. They can't beat us, Stretch."

But in the fancy dive, which Sunrise had expected

THE LAST EVENT

to win without question, Bob Conlon, their star entry, struck his head on the springboard on his second attempt at a back jack-knife and was unable to continue. As a result, Pinetree counted eight precious points, and made the score all even.

Thirty-six to thirty-six, and only the quarter mile remaining!

CHAPTER IX

THE WINNER

WHEN Bob Conlon injured his head so that he could not continue in the fancy diving event, Stretch Magens sank down weakly upon the slippery floor of the dock, while the surface of the lake danced crazily before his staring eyes and the group of boys on the beach became a dark, indeterminate mass of shifting figures.

For perhaps five minutes, while the camp physician dressed Conlon's wound and the three remaining divers continued to perform, Stretch sat motionless, his knee drawn up to his chin, his face buried in his arms.

"Darn it all!" he said.

The burden of defeat pressed heavy upon him. When he had made his sacrifice, had generously permitted Rex Skillman to finish ahead of him in the hundred-yard swim, Sunrise had been ten points in the lead and ultimate victory had been practically assured. He had meant Rex to win; and when Rex had been beaten by inches, Stretch was conscious only of a personal regret that Rex would not be awarded the gold medal. But he had not suspected for an instant that the thing he had done would weaken the

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chances of the team. Much as he wanted to even his own score, he knew that the camp came first.

But even after that unexpected setback, Sunrise was still eight points in the lead, and only two events remained to be contested. If Bob Conlon had not been injured, Sunrise would have won five points in the dive and would have been assured of victory. But now the count was even, and only the quarter mile was left. And Tony Cuppola, who was swimming for Pinetree, had never yet been beaten.

At the thought of Tony, Stretch raised his head, and his lips parted. Tony's opponent, of course, was Ward Jackson; and Ward had saved the other boy's life. If it had not been for Ward, Tony would not be swimming at all. Surely, in view of all that had happened. . . .

Suddenly resolute, Stretch leaped to his feet and hurried along the dock to the place where Tony Cuppola was standing.

"Tony," he announced excitedly, "I want to see you a minute."

The Italian boy nodded quietly and followed Stretch to the shore.

"I am going to swim in a few minutes now," he said.

"I know." Stretch looked into the depths of Tony's clear black eyes and was suddenly doubtful. But he did not waver. "That's what I want to speak to you about."

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“Yes?”

“You realize, don’t you,” Stretch continued, “that Ward Jackson saved your life and that you owe him something?”

“Yes,” Tony answered, “I—I can never forget.”

“Well, then, I’m going to give you a chance to pay him back.”

“How?”

“By letting him win the quarter mile this afternoon.”

There was a moment of silence, while Tony’s brown face darkened and his fingers twitched nervously.

“I don’t think I could do that,” he said slowly.

“Probably you don’t quite understand,” Stretch told him. “Here at Sunrise we give a big cup every year to the man who has done the most for the camp. Ward is one of the two fellows in line for it, and if he wins this afternoon, if his *team* wins, he probably will be chosen for—for the big honor. And he wants it, Tony.”

“But he has a chance to beat me, if he swims fast enough.”

“Not much of a chance, though.” Stretch spoke eagerly. “A few weeks ago,” he explained, “Rex Skillman let me win the tennis tournament because I hurt my ankle when I was ahead. To-day, in an attempt to pay him back, I let him beat me in the hundred-yard swim. If I had won the race, as I *could* have, Sunrise would now have thirty-eight

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points instead of thirty-six, and a second in the quarter mile would give us the meet. But I did the big thing, Tony, and we're in danger of losing."

But Tony Cuppola only raised puzzled eyes to the boy before him.

"I don't quite understand why you did it," he said.

"Because," Stretch told him, "it was the sportsmanlike thing to do. That's how we're expected to act here in America, Tony."

The brown-skinned Italian boy shook his head doubtfully.

"Would it be sportsmanlike," he asked quietly, "for me to lose the meet for my camp, just to pay a personal debt?"

Stretch wavered for a moment before the direct question. Then he shook his head angrily.

"Yes," he answered, "in this case, I think it would. Your own life is more important than your camp, isn't it?"

"But—but is it more important than my honor?"

The dive had been completed, and as they stood there facing each other on the wooded shore, the first call sounded for the quarter mile.

"You're talking nonsense, Tony," Stretch declared desperately. "I've told you what it means to Ward, and it's up to you to do the square thing."

Stretch turned away angrily, his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets.

"Wait a minute," Tony said. There was pain in

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his eyes, and honest bewilderment. "Over at Pine-tree," he continued, "the young men have taken me in as one of them, have made me feel at home, and have given me their friendship. They expect me to do my best for them, and for the camp. I—I don't know, Mr. Stretch."

But Stretch was oblivious to the appeal in his eyes.

"It's up to you," he said shortly, "to decide between them and Ward."

"Last call for the quarter mile!" the announcer boomed.

Stretch Magens walked away, his eyes flashing resentfully. Whatever the outcome, he told himself grimly, he had done his best for Ward and for Sunrise. But somehow, the knowledge left him strangely depressed, as if, after all, his best had not been quite good enough.

Ward Jackson and Tony Cuppola took their places tensely at the edge of the dock. They were the only two entries, and upon their shoulders rested the burden of defeat or the glory of victory. Just for an instant, as their eyes met, Ward smiled.

"It's up to us, Tony," he said.

But the other boy did not answer; his face, Ward noticed, was lined as if in pain, and his lips quivered. At the sound of the gun, they leaped off together.

Ward had decided, earlier in the day, to let Tony set the pace. His one hope seemed to be to hang on to his opponent until the last fifteen yards, and then

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to try to beat him in a final desperate drive to the tape. Tony, according to past performances, was the faster swimmer; and Ward knew, as he followed in the wake of the other boy, that it was courage, and courage alone, which would beat him. So Ward swam easily, waiting for the first sign of faltering on the part of his rival.

But Tony Cuppola did not falter. With long, powerful strokes he cut through the water, his face half buried, his legs kicking steadily, in rhythmic motion. With hardly a yard separating them, they completed the first half of the journey—eight lengths of the pool.

On the shore, the members of both camps had leaped to their feet and were cheering wildly, discordantly. The sound of their shrill voices drifted to Ward Jackson as if from a great distance, serving to clear his mind, to strengthen his determination to win. Suddenly eager, he drew even with the straining Tony, while the cheering from the beach grew more pronounced.

“Rah, rah, rah!
Sunrise!
JACKSON!”

Tony, however, continued his even pace, and Ward dropped back again. They traversed one length of the pool—another.

“Six more to go,” Ward muttered; and set himself grimly to his task.

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Tony, he realized vaguely, was setting an unusually fast pace. If he kept it up to the end, he would finish in close to six minutes, and Ward had never swum the distance within ten seconds of that phenomenal time. Discouragement gripped him, a sense of futility, of utter helplessness swept over him. But he fought on doggedly, ignoring the growing pain in the muscles of his shoulders, the increasing weariness of his aching limbs. And always, the bobbing head of Tony Cuppola loomed before him.

At the beginning of the thirteenth lap, their positions were unchanged. Four more to go! Four more! With parted lips and shining eyes, Ward continued his desperate fight for victory. Once, as he glanced up, he glimpsed the eager face of Curly Lockwood; and at sight of the other boy, it occurred to him that, if he should lose, Curly would be awarded the Silver Cup. But Ward did not care for the cup just then, did not care for anything except the grim necessity of beating Tony Cuppola. The men on the shore, he reflected, were cheering for him to win, were expecting him to win. He was fighting now, not for himself, but for the camp. For Sunrise!

With undimmed courage, he plowed his way forward, battling against the weariness which gripped him, ignoring the temptation to ease his efforts just for a moment. At the beginning of the fifteenth lap, he was swimming purely on his nerve. But he kept on unwaveringly. Two more!

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His brain was whirling now in a chaos of conflicting thoughts, and his chest ached dully, so that he found it hard to breathe. The cheering of his camp-mates changed to a rumbling roar which had lost all meaning. But Ward knew instinctively that they had finished the fifteenth lap and had started the return journey again. And still, Tony Cuppola kept on, without faltering, apparently tireless.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, however, when they were halfway to the dock, Tony faltered. The smooth rhythm of his stroke was broken, his feet appeared momentarily on the surface and splashed wildly. Ward, realizing only vaguely what had happened, found himself even with the other boy; and then—oh, wonder of wonders—he swept into the lead. When they turned for the final fifteen yards of the race, he led by a single foot. Tony was behind him; how far he did not know—but somewhere in the *rear*.

Ward called then upon the last ounce of his reserve. His muscles ached so that each succeeding stroke was an agony of effort; his breath caught in his throat and wheezed through his lips in gasping sobs; and his legs were heavy with such fatigue as he had never known. Ahead of him, only a few yards away, stretched the tape, held in a rigid line from shore to float. He fought toward it, angry at himself for not going faster, vaguely indignant that it should be there to challenge him, to mock him for his helplessness. He could never make it, he de-

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cided; some one was pulling it away from him. . . . And then, suddenly, it was gone; and in a clear burst of understanding, he knew that he had won.

With a deep sigh that was almost a sob, he turned on his back and eased his aching muscles. A thunder of sound encompassed him, dark figures leaped about the beach, and the boats anchored beyond the float danced crazily.

And then, out of the din of hoarse cheering, there arose a sudden sharp cry of warning.

“Tony!”

Instinctively, Ward Jackson turned, just in time to glimpse the dark hair of Tony Cuppola disappearing beneath the water of the pool.

Tony had gone! Tony was drowning!

Dazedly, Ward lay where he was, realizing the necessity for instant action, but powerless to raise his aching arms. Sobbing helplessly, he kicked through the water toward the spot where the other boy had disappeared. But he knew that even if he should reach Tony in time, he had not the strength to support him.

Then, from off the swaying float, a boy dove cleanly into the ruffled pool, passed Ward in a few desperate strokes, and sank beneath the surface. In another moment, he appeared again, holding the unconscious form of Tony Cuppola in his arms.

“I’ve got him!” he gasped.

It was Stretch Magens.

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Stretch, supporting Tony with one arm, trod water desperately and turned an appealing face to the watching boys on the float.

"Hurry!" he panted. "We've got to get him out of here."

Curly Lockwood and two or three of the others dived into the pool, relieved Stretch of his burden and lifted Tony from the water. Mr. Merritt, taking command, laid Tony carefully upon the wet boards and pumped his arms rhythmically.

"Some one get hold of the camp physician," he ordered. "Tony, I think, will be all right in a few minutes."

"Are you sure?" Ward asked.

"I think so." The older man looked up gravely. "He gave so much to the race," he said, "that he collapsed at the finish. But if he hasn't swallowed any water——"

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Tony's eyes opened. For a moment he regarded the anxious faces around him dazedly; and then, his mind clearing, he struggled to a sitting position.

"Who—who won?" he asked.

"Ward just managed to beat you out," Mr. Merritt told him gently. "But you swam a great race, Tony—one of the greatest I have ever seen."

The eyes of the Italian boy searched the group around him until they found Stretch Magens.

"The best that I could do," he whispered.

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"Of course." Mr. Merritt turned. "I'm taking Tony up to my tent," he announced. "He'll have to keep quiet for a while."

One of the Pinetree counselors stepped forward.

"Probably it would be wise to keep him here overnight."

"Yes. And you can be assured that we'll give him the best of care."

"I know that." The other man nodded. "All right, fellows, let's get dressed."

But Tex Austin, who had led the Pinetree cheering throughout the afternoon, held up his hand for silence.

"A long yell, fellows," he directed, "for Sunrise!"

After the cheer was finished, Curly Lockwood turned to his fellow campers.

"The Sunrise yell," he ordered, "for Pinetree! And how about three Tony Cuppolas on the end?"

They gave them with a will; and Tony, a huddled heap in the sturdy arms of Mr. Merritt, smiled happily.

CHAPTER X

REWARDS

ONCE inside his tent, Ward Jackson dressed hurriedly. He had called upon the last ounce of his reserve strength in order to win from Tony, and he was tired. His muscles ached, and there was a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach. The elation which would naturally have come from a hard won victory was lacking, because of the near tragedy which had followed.

"We'll have to hand it to Tony for nerve," Rex Skillman announced. "I've seen a lot of races in my time, but I've never yet known a man to keep on fighting until he couldn't hold his head above water."

Stretch Magens looked up gravely.

"Tony's all right!" he said.

At Ward's questioning glance, he dropped his eyes and busied himself with a stubborn shoelace.

"If it hadn't been for you—" Rex began.

But Stretch cut him short.

"If I hadn't gone in after him, some one else would. And I owe him something, anyhow."

"Well, you're all even now."

"Not quite," Stretch said evenly.

But he offered no explanation; and Ward, looking

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at him thoughtfully, could not understand. For Stretch was without doubt one of the big heroes of the camp; he had been the first of all the onlookers to act when Tony Cuppola's life was in danger, and ordinarily he would have basked in the limelight, would have reveled in the praises of his friends. Now, however, he did not want to say anything about it; he acted, in fact, as if he would prefer the incident to be forgotten as soon as possible.

"It sure is beyond me," Ward muttered.

Rex, first dressed, announced that he was going down to the dock to talk things over.

"After that, I think I'll drop in to see Tony. You two heroes can stick around by yourselves for a while."

But there was no answering smile on Stretch's face, and when the other boy had gone, Stretch stood up and thrust his hands into the pockets of his white flannels.

"I'm *some* hero," he said disgustedly.

"Of course you are," Ward told him. "But you're not acting like one."

Stretch, relapsing into silence, seated himself on the edge of the bed and waited for Ward to comb his stubborn hair into place.

"Let's get out of here," Ward suggested. "It's hot as blazes."

Stretch shook his head.

"Just a second. I—I want to tell you something."

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“Shoot!”

“Just before the quarter-mile race began,” Stretch explained slowly, “I called Tony Cuppola aside and suggested to him that he let you beat him.”

“What’s that?” Ward’s eyes opened wide.

“I told him,” Stretch continued, “that he owed you for his life and that the least he could do was to let you win a race in return.”

“And what did he say?”

Stretch smiled ruefully.

“He told me to go to blazes—only in his own way, of course.”

“Humph!”

Stretch rested his elbows on his knees and looked straight before him.

“I didn’t see it at the time,” he said. “I was excited, I guess, and I wanted you to win. But I was pretty much of a mucker even to suggest it.”

Ward, his eyes troubled, did not know quite what to say. He was certain, though, that Tony had given his best. He had said so—and Tony’s word was as good as a bond.

After a moment, however, Ward stood up and laid a hand carelessly on the other boy’s shoulder.

“You meant all right, Stretch,” he said quietly, “and after all, it—it didn’t make any difference.”

“It *did* make a difference,” Stretch maintained. “It showed me up for the boob that I am, and it

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proved to us that Tony Cuppola is true blue all the way."

"You're not a boob," Ward said. "The fact that you told me about it proves that."

"Thanks!" Stretch gulped, and Ward noticed that his eyes were rimmed with tears. "Anyhow," Stretch concluded, "I've learned a thing or two this summer."

They went out of the tent together. The majority of the boys were near the shore, talking over the swimming meet and its sensational ending. Far out on the lake, the boats from Pinetree were tiny dots upon the water.

"On Monday," Ward announced regretfully, "we go home. But we've had a great time, Stretch."

"Yes."

They were silent for a moment. Curly Lockwood, discovering them, waved from the float.

"Come on down, you fellows!"

"Can't," Ward answered. "We're going over to see Tony."

In Mr. Merritt's tent, they found the Italian boy. His face was pale and there were tired lines about his mouth, but otherwise he seemed none the worse for his experience. He greeted them with a wistful smile, but he spoke first to Stretch.

"Thank you," he said. "I have been hearing how you jumped into the pool after me."

Stretch took his outstretched hand in awkward embarrassment.

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"It wasn't anything. I just happened to be first in, that's all."

"In cases like that," Tony told him evenly, "every second counts."

"I am the man who ought to have held you up," Ward said. "But, Tony, I was so dog-gone tired I couldn't move."

"Let's forget it," Stretch suggested. His eyes found Tony's and held them. "I'm sorry, old man, about what I said before the race," he announced huskily.

Tony looked over at Ward doubtfully.

"Stretch told me about it," Ward explained.

"And do you think that I did the right thing?"

"The only thing, Tony, that a good sportsman could do."

The eyes of the Italian boy cleared, and his smile was like a ray of sunshine.

"It was hard," he said, "but my honor is dearer even than my life."

"And I was pretty much of a mucker to suggest it to you," Stretch put in. "I'm sorry, Tony."

After a moment of tense silence, Ward spoke again.

"How are you feeling, anyhow?"

"All right," Tony answered. "I didn't swallow much water, and"—he flexed the muscles of his arm experimentally—"I'm just as good as ever now."

"Feel like eating?"

"Yes."

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Ward winked significantly at Stretch.

"We'll take you to supper then, in about an hour. Come on, Stretch!"

"I'll come with you," Tony announced.

But Ward shook his head.

"We don't want you," he declared in mock severity. "The thing for you to do is to get some sleep, if you can."

When they were again outside the tent, Ward grinned into Stretch's somber eyes.

"All Tony needs is a little rest."

"I wish I could do something for him," Stretch said wistfully.

"You *did* do something."

But Stretch was unusually quiet during the remainder of the afternoon; and as soon as the fellows on the float left him to himself, he slipped back to Mr. Merritt's tent and talked to Tony until Ward dropped in. Later with Bill Barrett and Curly Lockwood they sat near the head of the long table in the dining hall; and if his appetite was any criterion, Tony was indeed as well as ever.

"They must feed you pretty good over at Pine-tree," Curly suggested jokingly. "Do the rest of that crowd eat as much as you do?"

"Some!" Tony answered. "I—" he announced, after a moment—"I ought to be getting back to-night."

"Not on your life," Bill Barrett told him. "We

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have our big mass meeting after supper, and we expect you to give a speech.”

But Tony's eyes opened in wild panic at that, and Ward hastened to reassure him.

“Bill's only fooling. You've done enough for one day, Tony.”

“But you'll come to the meeting, won't you?” Bill asked.

“I will be glad to,” Tony answered gravely.

As soon as supper was finished, he followed Ward and Stretch to the shore of the lake, where the mass meeting was to be held. Some one had built a log fire, which glowed brightly; and at one side, Dr. Southard, the camp director, had placed a table, upon which rested the massive Silver Cup to be awarded to the man who had done most for Sunrise.

At the sight of it, Ward Jackson's heart missed a beat. He knew, now that he had won the swimming meet for the camp, that the cup would be given either to him or to Curly Lockwood; and although he told himself that it wouldn't matter one way or the other, he knew in his heart of hearts that it mattered a good deal.

Tony, sitting beside him on the sloping bank, turned curiously.

“Is that the cup for the best man in camp?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And you will get it?”

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"I don't know," Ward said. "Probably not."

"But it belongs to you. You have done very much for Sunrise."

"So have some of the other fellows."

"It ought to go to you," Tony persisted. "Perhaps, if——"

But Dr. Southard, rising, held up his hand for silence.

"This," he announced slowly, "is our last night but one at camp; and according to the usual custom we shall vote the Silver Cup to that man who has done most for Sunrise. The season, I think, has been a good one; one of fine spirit, of real accomplishments, of athletic successes. We have upheld the standard of other years, have, in some cases, surpassed it. And who is the man most responsible? I am waiting for your verdict."

No one spoke for a moment; and then, unexpectedly, Stretch Magens stood up. His face was flushed, but his eyes were resolute, and when he spoke there was no tremor in his voice.

"I nominate Ward Jackson," he said.

"Second the motion!"

As some one started to clap, Ward leaped to his feet.

"I name Curly Lockwood," he began.

But Curly interrupted him.

"Oh, sit down! I got it last year. It's your turn now."

REWARDS

"Vote! Vote!" some one called.

But Ward, his eyes shining, held up his hand for silence. When finally the chattering boys around him had quieted, he cleared his throat, and began to speak huskily.

"I'm wondering," he said, "if it wouldn't be possible for us to leave both Curly and me out of it. There's another fellow in camp who's done something really big. He saved a man's life and prevented our swimming meet from ending in a tragedy. What about Stretch Magens?"

For an instant, no one spoke. Stretch, his face white, caught Ward's glance, held it, and shook his head slowly. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Count me out of it, fellows," he declared shrilly. "I'm not in line for an honor like that—and Ward knows it."

It occurred to Ward that Stretch was thinking of that brief minute before the quarter-mile race, when he had thrown temptation in the way of Tony Cupola. But Stretch, Ward told himself grimly, had done a big thing. Surely——

The boys around him began to stir restlessly.

"Let's have the vote," one of them suggested.

"Who's nominated, anyhow?"

Dr. Southard's upraised hand commanded silence.

"The one name before us is Ward Jackson," he said. Stretch stood up.

"I move that the nominations be closed."

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"Second the motion!" Curly Lockwood called.

"All in favor?"

A chorus of "ayes" sounded from a hundred lusty throats; and Dr. Southard grinned into the eager mass of faces before him.

"The election," he said, "seems to be unanimous." Reaching down, he picked from the table the massive silver loving cup. "It is my pleasure," he announced, "to award this cup to Ward Jackson—our camp leader."

Ward climbed to his feet, happier than he had remembered being for a long time, but wishing, nevertheless, that the ground would open and swallow him. With awkward steps he stumbled up the narrow aisle to where the venerable director stood waiting.

Then, while the boys listened eagerly, Dr. Southard spoke:

"I am glad, Ward, that you have earned the right to own this cup. From the standpoint of money, its value is not great; but it stands for something big, something fine, to which only a leader can attain. You came to Sunrise as a new boy, but from the very first you have absorbed the spirit which has long been one of our most cherished traditions, have strengthened it and made it more than ever a part of the camp itself. And with this award, I extend to you my congratulations and hearty good wishes."

Some one started to clap; and after a moment, the Sunrise cheer boomed out across the shadowed lake.

REWARDS

“Speech! Speech!”

Turning, Ward regarded the others with shining eyes. He was expected to say something, he knew; but words would not come.

“Speech!” they called again.

Ward wet dry lips with his tongue.

“There isn’t anything to say,” he began, “except to tell you fellows how much I appreciate this. It’s fine, and—and—” Something caught in his throat, and he stopped in an agony of embarrassment.

“Let’s give him another yell,” Rex Skillman called.

In the cheer that followed, Ward made his escape and sank down beside the beaming Tony Cuppola.

“I wouldn’t have missed this for a thousand dollars,” Tony whispered to him.

Ordinarily, the meeting would have been over then, but just before they shifted to their feet, Mr. Merritt took his place beside Dr. Southard, and held up his hand.

“Fellows,” he said, “I want to have just a word with you before we break up for the night.” He paused as if to ask their permission to go ahead, and in the brief silence which ensued, Curly Lockwood leaped to his feet.

“A long yell,” he called, “for the whitest man that ever lived.”

When the cheer had died away, Mr. Merritt, acknowledging their tribute, spoke again.

“I have in my hand,” he said, “a gold medal which

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was given me a few years ago for winning the Metropolitan high jumping championship. It was the first time that I had ever won a big event of any kind, and I have long cherished the prize because it represented a hard fight and a grim fight to overcome some faults in my jumping style. Since then, I have been given other medals, but the one in my hand has always meant something significant. It has stood for conquest, not of others but of self."

Just for a moment, the speaker waited, while the boys leaned forward in their places, curious and expectant.

"There is a fellow who came to Sunrise at the beginning of the summer," Mr. Merritt continued, "who did not fit in so very well at first. But gradually he began to forget about himself, his own ambitions, his own aspirations; until finally, this very afternoon, he crowned his summer work with an act of heroism which resulted in the saving of another fellow's life. And so, with the permission of you men, I want to present this medal—to Stretch Magens, who has learned during the past two months how to play the game."

Mr. Merritt looked up and grinned into Stretch's wondering eyes.

"Yea!" some one called.

Then the cheering began.

CHAPTER XI

BACK TO SCHOOL

IT was the last night in camp. On the yellow sand of the beach, a hundred boys sat silently around a blazing fire, while the venerable Dr. Southard talked to them about the ideals of Sunrise. After a time they sang, their youthful voices ringing over the placid waters of the lake. Ward Jackson and Stretch Magens joined the others in the old familiar hymns—"How Firm a Foundation," "Rock of Ages," and "Lead, Kindly Light."

Once, between selections, Stretch leaned over and laid a hand upon Ward's shoulder.

"It's great," he said huskily.

"Sure is!" Ward answered.

When finally the meeting was ended, the campers climbed regretfully to their feet and shuffled slowly to the circle of tents dimly outlined in the light of myriad stars.

But the next morning they were themselves again, a laughing, shouting, joyous group of boys, sorry to leave, of course, but glad in many ways that they were soon to be home again.

Curly Lockwood and Rex Skillman said good-by at Albany.

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"Next year," Curly declared emphatically, "we're all coming back again."

"Right-o!" Stretch answered.

"And we'll try to see that you Hillsdale fellows don't cop all the honors."

They grinned into one another's eyes, shook hands with just a touch of formality, and raced for their trains. Late in the night, Ward and his two chums tumbled out upon the Hillsdale station—and were home again. And the next morning, school began.

Ward, joining the whistling Bill Barrett, found a group of his classmates awaiting him in front of the building.

"Oh, you Ward!"

"How goes it, Bill?"

"Fine!" they answered, and shook hands all around.

Jim Andrews, varsity guard on the football team, regarded them critically.

"It sure is good to have you back again," he said. "How were things up at camp?"

"Great!" Bill declared. "And Ward here was the big noise, as usual."

"Are you in good shape?"

"Hard as a rock." Ward flexed the muscles of his arm. "Feel that."

"You'll pass, I guess." Jim's eyes grew suddenly serious. "You fellows have heard about Mr. Merritt, of course."

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"Heard what?"

"About his new job?"

"Not a word." Ward looked up apprehensively.

"He isn't leaving, is he?"

"Not so you'd notice it. Myers has resigned as principal and Mr. Merritt has been given the job."

"Gee, that's great!" Ward clear eyes beamed happily. "It will be a fine thing for Hillsdale."

"I'll say it will."

They were silent for a moment. Mr. Myers, former head of the school, had been a good principal; but Mr. Merritt, he knew, would be a better one.

"How about Stretch?" Mel Chalmers, another of the football team, asked suddenly. "Did he get along all right in camp?"

"He was one of the leaders," Ward answered. "Won a medal for saving a fellow's life."

"He'll come through this year then, do you think?"

"He sure will. You can count—" Ward's eyes lighted suddenly. "Here he is now."

They pressed forward with outstretched hands; Andrews and Chalmers, Doc Foulds, the school quarterback, and Ned Conrad, whom they hoped to develop into an end.

"Heard about Mr. Merritt, haven't you?" Jim asked.

"Just a couple of minutes ago," Stretch answered. "Great, isn't it?"

"The best piece of news in years."

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Jim turned again to Ward.

"But something else has happened while you were away," he announced. "Do you know about the pupils from Wintonville?"

Ward shook his head.

"What about them?" he asked.

"Wintonville High School burned down this summer," Jim explained. "And they've transferred all their students to Hillsdale for a year—until they can put up a new building."

Ward frowned.

"They—they're a bunch of roughnecks, aren't they?" he asked doubtfully.

"Most of them are." Jim's eyes, also, were dubious. "There are about fifty of them, and they'll come to school every morning in a bus."

"Humph!" Ward regarded the other boys somberly, wondering how the new order of things would affect the spirit of the school. Wintonville was a purely manufacturing town about four miles from Hillsdale; its citizens were mostly foreigners, skilled mechanics or ordinary day laborers.

"I hope," he said, "that they won't try to start anything."

"Probably," Bill Barrett suggested, "there'll be some good football players among them. They'll be eligible for the team, you know."

"Yes, I know." But the worried lines remained in

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Ward's honest face. "I think," he said finally, "that I'd rather have just our own bunch."

Bill Barrett's eyes twinkled.

"Why the snobbishness, Ward?" he asked mildly.

"I don't want to be a snob," Ward told him, "but I have a feeling, somehow, that things aren't going to go very well."

"Mr. Merritt can handle it, all right," Jim put in.

They relapsed into thoughtful silence, pondering over Ward's unexpected attitude. And as they waited on the sun-bathed steps of the school for the bell to ring, three massive auto buses rolled up in front of the building and came to a grinding halt. A half hundred or so boys and girls tumbled out, regarding the group on the steps curiously.

"There they are now," Bill said.

Ward regarded them critically. It took only a single glance to show him that the new pupils were different in many ways from the regular students at Hillsdale. They were smaller, on the whole, not so well dressed, and undoubtedly on lower social strata. But their eyes were eager for the new adventure, and their faces were friendly. After all, Ward reflected, they were going to be his schoolmates. He was sorry that he had said anything against them.

Suddenly, a heavy-set boy with bulging shoulders gathered the newcomers around him and said something in a low tone. The others nodded eagerly, and

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at his command drew into a compact circle and united in a ringing cheer:

Rah, rah, rah,
Rah, rah, rah,
Who are we?
Wait and see!
Wintonville, Wintonville,
WINTONVILLE!

Ward's eyes narrowed at that; but it was Stretch Magens who spoke.

"That kind of thing has got to stop," he said evenly. "They're *Hillsdale* students now."

"You just bet they are," Jim Andrews agreed.

From somewhere inside, a bell clanged sharply, and the group on the porch stood up.

"All in!" Ward called. His blue eyes regarded his classmates gravely. "Fellows," he said, "let's make this the biggest year of all—for Hillsdale."

Nodding, they followed him into the building.

There was a good deal of confusion preceding the opening assembly. The Wintonville pupils did not know where to go or what to do, and for a few minutes they wandered around aimlessly, making a lot of noise about it and apparently enjoying themselves immensely. But finally, the teachers directed them to their different classrooms, and quiet descended upon the school. Then another bell clanged, and they marched in ordered file to the auditorium.

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There was the usual hymn, the reading of the Bible and the morning prayer, after which Mr. Merritt advanced to the front of the raised platform and regarded the two hundred pupils before him with impassive face.

“Students of Hillsdale High,” he began, in a voice which was not loud but which carried, nevertheless, into the farthest corners of the room, “we are about to begin a new year under most favorable auspices. Due to an unfortunate fire at Wintonville, we have the pleasure of counting among our own numbers the pupils of the neighboring high school. We will all welcome them, I am sure, into the Hillsdale family, will give them the hand of fellowship and ask them to be one with us, in our standards, our ideals, and our spirit.”

He paused for a moment, to permit the thunder of applause which had greeted his words to die away. Then, he continued:

“You must also know that Mr. Myers has resigned, and that the Board of Education has seen fit to appoint me to the responsibilities of his office. For a brief time there will be no changes in the general policy of the school; and I can now only express to you my pleasure at being your leader and to ask for your coöperation in all things. But one thing we must do: we must all work together for the good of the school; must strengthen its spirit, cherish its name, keep untarnished the ideals for which it has

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always stood. This is our big year, our best year, and our year of greatest achievement."

At his grave nod of dismissal, Ward Jackson rose from his seat and held up his hand.

"A long yell," he called, "for the squarest man that ever lived. And let's make it a good one!"

He noticed, however, in the volume of sound that followed his suggestion, that the pupils from Wintonville did not join. And at the sight of them sitting stolidly in their places, his earlier apprehension came back again. Frowning, he followed his classmates to the Senior room.

But the day advanced without incident, except for the slight confusion of minor adjustments. At noon, Bill Barrett posted a notice on the bulletin board:

Football Practice

First football practice will be held on the Hillsdale Oval directly after school this afternoon. Candidates are requested to report to Coach Merritt in the school basement at 3.15.

BILL BARRETT, *Captain*.

A group of curious boys gathered around the board, speculating upon the chances of a winning season, wondering who was going to fill the place left vacant by Bill Stackhouse, star end of last year's eleven. The Wintonville pupils were downstairs eating their lunches.

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"Maybe," Mel Chalmers suggested, "that big fellow who led their yell this morning is a football player. He looks like one."

Jim Andrews smiled amusedly.

"He's in my English class," he offered, "and his name is Joe Krasowski."

The others grinned.

"Some name!"

"Must have been born in Ireland!"

"He's Polish," Bill Barrett explained quietly. "And his father's foreman of the Mencken Chemical Works down at Wintonville."

"How about football? Did they have a team last year?"

"Yes, but it wasn't much good." Bill spoke doubtfully. "There ought to be a couple of real players among them, though," he added.

"Think they'll come out for the team?" Jim asked.

"Why not? It will be pretty poor spirit if they don't."

Ward suddenly remembered the yell that had been given that morning—not for Hillsdale, but for *Wintonville*.

"Maybe," he suggested, "we ought to go down and see them instead of just leaving it to the notice."

"Perhaps you're right," Bill agreed reluctantly. "Come ahead, we'll do it now."

Ward and Stretch accompanied him to the basement, where they found Joe Krasowski, together with

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three other boys, inspecting the school heating system.

"My name's Barrett," Bill said pleasantly, "and I'm captain of the football team. Thought maybe we ought to get acquainted."

The Wintonville boys turned and regarded him doubtfully, but without hostility.

"Glad to know you," Joe Krasowski answered. "This fellow here is my brother Jed, and the other two are George Coker and Fred Burchan."

There was a round of handshaking before Bill spoke again.

"We're holding first football practice this afternoon," he explained, "and we're hoping that some of you fellows will come out. You had a team at your school last year, didn't you?"

"Yes, we had a team all right," Joe replied sulkily, "but probably we ain't good enough for you fellows."

Bill's eyes widened.

"At Hillsdale," he said quietly, "every candidate has an equal chance."

"Yes, but we're from Wintonville."

"That won't make any difference. We're all Hillsdale men now."

Joe Krasowski smiled dryly.

"We all go to the same school," he agreed. "But that might mean something, then again it mightn't."

"It will," Bill told him evenly. "But how about the team? You're coming out, aren't you?"

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The other boy hesitated, regarding his companions with questioning eyes.

"How are we going to get home if we do?" he asked.

"You can take a trolley car."

"And get back about seven o'clock every night, I suppose?"

Bill nodded.

"It means sacrifice, of course," he agreed. "But it will be worth it, if you make the team."

"Why?" Joe Krasowski asked him bluntly.

"It's worth almost anything to be able to play for your school."

"My school is Wintonville."

"Not now. It's Hillsdale."

There was a moment of silence, while the eyes of the two boys met and held.

"Hillsdale needs you," Bill said finally, fighting down the anger which gripped him. "And we'd like to have you try for the team."

But the other boy only turned away indifferently.

"We'll think about it," he said.

"And you won't come out this afternoon?"

"No."

Bill gulped, his eyes glowing angrily.

"I'll talk to you about it to-morrow," he said.

"This furnace," Joe Krasowski remarked to his brother Jed, "has got a pretty good firebed."

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Bill Barrett turned away wearily, the eager light gone from his eyes. Frowning, Ward Jackson followed him up the broad stairway.

"This," Ward declared disgustedly, "is *some* beginning for a football season." Then his square jaw tightened. "But we'll get those fellows yet," he added.

Bill Barrett nodded grimly.

"The school will *make* them come out," he said.

CHAPTER XII

"TO-MORROW BY TO-DAY"

TWENTY candidates for the varsity football team reported in the locker room of the high school shortly after three o'clock that afternoon. Not a Wintonville man was among them.

Briefly, and with a touch of bitterness, Captain Bill Barrett told of his interview with Joe Krasowski. And when he had finished, Stretch Magens, impulsive, quick of temper, and aggressive, leaped from the long wooden bench on which he had been sitting, and regarded the team leader with angry eyes.

"If I were you," he said grimly, "I'd tell that fellow just where he got off."

"If I do that," Bill answered, "he'll *never* come out for the team."

"Let him stay away then. We got along without that whole crew last year, and we can do the same now."

"But we could use them," Bill argued stubbornly. "We weren't any world-beaters last year, remember?"

"What if we weren't? We had a lot of fun out of it."

"Yes," Bill answered, "but we want to win for the school, if we can."

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"We'll do it, though, without Krasowski and his gang."

"At any rate," Mel Chalmers put in, "they haven't refused to come out yet. And it isn't any cinch to get home at seven o'clock every night."

"The thing to do," Ward said, "is to go ahead just the same, whether they come out or not."

"We'll *have* to," Bill agreed grimly. They all looked up expectantly as Mr. Merritt entered. The older man nodded briskly, glanced at the group of candidates before him, and frowned.

"What about the boys from Wintonville?" he asked. "Haven't any of them reported?"

"No," Stretch told him angrily, "and they're not likely to, either—the roughnecks."

The principal raised his eyes and looked fairly into Stretch's.

"Stretch," he said quietly, "here at Hillsdale, one man is just as good as another. There isn't any such thing as a roughneck; it's the stuff inside of us that counts, you know."

Two bright spots of red appeared on Stretch's pale face, and his sensitive lips quivered. Ward Jackson, watching him, remembered the time when Stretch would have openly resented such words. But now, Stretch only grinned feebly.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But Bill asked them to come out, and they turned him down."

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"Not exactly that," Bill explained. "They wanted to think it over a bit."

"That's fair enough; they haven't, of course, begun to absorb the Hillsdale spirit yet." The school principal dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand. "How about your team, Bill?" he asked. "I wasn't here last year, you know."

"We've got Ward at fullback, and myself at half, and Doc Foulds at quarterback," Bill explained. "On the line, there's Chubby Betts for center, Mel Chalmers for tackle, and Jim Andrews for guard. Stretch was end last year, and there are two good sub-linemen to fill in. But we need at least another end and a halfback. We're going to try to fit Ned Conrad for the backfield. The prospects are pretty good, I think."

The older man nodded, his eyes thoughtful.

"I've made inquiries at Wintonville," he announced unexpectedly, "and down there they think that the Krasowski brothers are about the two best ends in the business."

Stretch Magens frowned.

"*Both* of them?" he asked.

The team coach looked up at him quietly.

"Yes," he said.

Stretch turned away, his eyes dubious.

"And there's a boy named Fritzinger who plays a rattling good game at tackle," Mr. Merritt continued.

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“We could probably make use of him in the line, couldn’t we, Bill?”

The captain nodded.

“If he’ll come out,” he qualified.

“To-morrow, after lunch,” the principal announced, “I want you to send the Krasowski brothers to me.”

“I’ll tell them,” Bill promised.

“Let’s get into our suits now and out on the field,” the coach suggested. “How about the county championship, men? Are we going to win it?”

The abrupt question wakened them from the lethargy; they nodded grimly and looked up, eager-eyed.

“Watch us!” Jim Andrews said.

Ward, hurrying into his football togs, wondered what it was about Coach Merritt that could inspire such instant acquiescence, such a steadfast loyalty. He decided, as he followed the others out upon the field, that it was because the older man was so unquestionably loyal himself.

“Let’s go!” Ward said, when their cleated shoes dug into the soft turf of the gridiron. “Remember, fellows, this is our big year.”

He was eager to start scrimmage at once; to feel the contact of padded shoulders against his own sturdy legs, to cuddle the ball in his gripping arms and plunge into the center of an opposing line. But Coach Merritt, it seemed, had other ideas about the

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first day of practice. The did not scrimmage at all; did nothing except fall on the ball, try some forward passing and catching of punts, and run through a few brief formations, without calling signals. And Ward noticed that Stretch Magens listened eagerly to every word that the coach had to say. For a time he was puzzled over Stretch's unusual interest; and then, suddenly, the reason for it came to him. The Krasowski brothers were both good ends, Mr. Merritt had said; and Stretch was afraid of losing his position.

"I hope," Ward told himself, "that Stretch hangs on. If he doesn't, he's likely to get sore, and make trouble, perhaps."

But there did not seem to be much of a chance of Stretch losing his place. From what the Wintonville fellows had said, Ward felt rather certain that they would not report for the team. He did not think that even Mr. Merritt could persuade them.

Shortly after three o'clock the next afternoon, however, when he reported at the locker room, he found thirteen new candidates there before him. They were all boys from Wintonville.

He regarded them amazedly, mindful of their indifference to Bill Barrett's invitation.

"Hello, you fellows!" he said. "Glad to know that you're coming out."

Joe Krasowski grinned just a bit self-consciously.

"Been talking to the coach," he offered in explana-

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tion. "He's arranged to have a special bus meet us after practice every day."

"Good stuff!" Ward said.

His admiration for the school principal deepened. He had no idea of what Mr. Merritt had said; but he would like to have known.

Captain Bill Barrett, coming in a moment later, smiled relievedly at the increased number of candidates, but made no comment. They dressed quietly, the Wintonville boys in a group by themselves. Ward wished that Mr. Merritt would come in. A football team, he told himself, ought not to be divided. They would never get anywhere that way.

But Mr. Merritt did not make his appearance, and the candidates walked out upon the field in search of him, the Wintonville boys slightly in the rear. Bill Barrett threw out a ball, and the players tossed it to one another; all except Joe Krasowski and his followers. They waited on the sidelines, watching with curious eyes, but making no move to participate in the practice.

For a time Bill regarded them doubtfully.

"I haven't the least idea why they reported," he said to Ward. "I wonder what Mr. Merritt said to them?"

"Probably he'll never tell us," Ward answered. "But we've got to hand it to him; he sure does produce the goods."

The coach came finally, just when Bill had decided

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to go over and speak to the Wintonville crowd. Joe Krasowski grinned at the sight of him, and the older man nodded pleasantly.

"Glad to see that your team's reported, Joe," he said. "Let's see you fall on the ball."

Ward watched critically as Joe prepared to obey the command. The Wintonville leader eyed the bounding ball keenly, dashed forward at just the right moment, and scooped it into his arms skillfully, falling on his side and curving his body around the pigskin.

"Good work!" the coach told him. "Who taught you how to do that?"

"Nobody," Joe answered. "But I watched a practice at State University last year, and that was the way they did it."

"Let's see some of the rest of you try it."

The remainder of the Wintonville group, however, were obviously novices at the game, with the single exception of Jed Krasowski. The latter, however, duplicated his brother's achievement; and when he rose from the ground and wiped the dirt from his moleskin trousers, Coach Merritt commended him openly.

"It looks to me," he remarked casually, "as if you Krasowski brothers are born football players."

The two boys blushed in obvious gratitude.

"We're out for end," Joe said grimly.

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Stretch Magens, on the outer circle of watchers, snorted audibly.

“They’ll have to go some,” he whispered to Ward.

But Ward Jackson did not answer. He had seen a good many high school football players in his day, but none of them had surpassed the Krasowski brothers in natural ability. They were both large, with broad shoulders and heavily muscled legs. And it was apparent from the way they went about things that they knew how to handle themselves.

“It looks, Stretch,” he said finally, “as if you’re going to have a battle on your hands.”

But Stretch only snorted again.

“I’ve played end on the school team for two years,” he said, “and I guess it will take more than a couple of Wops to do me out of my position.”

“They’re not Wops,” Ward told him shortly.

He did not know whether to be glad or sorry that the Krasowski boys promised to be the two big “finds” of the season. Under ordinary circumstances, he would have welcomed them to the team with open arms, but the thought of Stretch Magens, and the possible effect of their candidacies upon him, placed the matter in a somewhat different light. Less than a year ago, Stretch had been the one big disturbing element in the life of the school, had done much to weaken the school spirit and lower its athletic standards. It had not been until the end of the track season, when Mr. Merritt had shown him the error

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of his ways, that he had changed. And now, Ward knew, there was no more loyal fellow at Hillsdale. But if Stretch should lose his position on the football team, there was a possibility that he would revert to his former ways, would try to make things unpleasant again, both for the team and for the coach. Ward found himself hoping that Stretch would prove to be a better player than either of the Krasowski boys. It seemed the only way out.

But the problem bothered him, made it hard to concentrate on the work at hand.

“Brace up!” Bill Barrett told him once. “The coach just said something to you, and you never even heard him.”

“I was worrying a bit about Stretch,” Ward admitted frankly.

The team captain frowned, but said nothing. At one side of the field, Doc Foulds was throwing forward passes to Joe Krasowski, but the Wintonville end did not seem to be particularly skillful at catching them. Ward, idle for the moment, walked over to watch him. Joe, it seemed, failed to turn at just the right moment, choosing, instead, to glance over his shoulder at Doc’s shrill cry and to catch the ball with his back toward the line of scrimmage.

Mr. Merritt, watching without comment for a time, finally called a halt.

“Joe,” he said mildly, “you’re not doing that exactly right.”

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The older of the Krasowski boys, who had, until that moment, received nothing but praise from the coach, looked up almost resentfully.

“What’s the trouble?” he asked.

“The way to catch a forward pass,” Mr. Merritt told him, “is to turn sharply at the command of the thrower, and catch it as you would a baseball or anything else—with your face toward it.”

Joe Krasowski shook his head.

“It isn’t the way I’ve been doing it.”

“It’s the right way, though.”

There was a hint of sharpness in the coach’s voice, and Joe evidently resented it.

“Mr. Merritt,” he said quietly, “last year people who saw me play said that I was the best catcher of passes in the county.”

The coach nodded.

“You’re telling me that you were good last year, aren’t you, Joe?” he asked quietly.

“Yes,” the boy answered.

“Well, let me tell *you* something.” The older man’s voice was still low, but a note of command had crept into it. “Here at Hillsdale,” he said, “*we judge a man’s to-morrow by his to-day, but never his to-day by his yesterday.*”

“Meaning?” Joe asked, unimpressed.

“Meaning,” the coach explained, “that no matter how good you used to be, you must show us how good you are *now* before making the Hillsdale team.”

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For a moment, Joe stood quietly, while the significance of the older man's words drummed itself into his rather slow-working mind. Then, unexpectedly, he grinned.

"I get you, Coach," he said evenly. "Let's try that forward pass again."

Ward Jackson, watching curiously, knew, as surely as if the line-up for the first game had been announced, that Joe Krasowski would be a member of the Hillsdale varsity. For he had proved, by that one incident, that he could accept criticisms without resentment, and that he could "*take his coaching.*"

Ward, turning away, repeated grimly the words which Mr. Merritt had spoken to the Wintonville end: "Here at Hillsdale, we judge a man's to-morrow by his to-day, but never his to-day by his yesterday."

To Ward's way of thinking, that could mean only one thing—that Stretch Magens' two previous years on the Hillsdale team would count for nothing at all. To make the team, Stretch had still to prove his worth to the keen-eyed coach. His to-morrow would be judged by his to-day, but not his to-day by his yesterday.

Across the field, Stretch was talking moodily to Jim Andrews. Glimpsing him, Ward found himself wondering vaguely if Stretch was equal to the task of proving himself all over again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HONOR SYSTEM

SCHOOL settled down to its usual routine of work, and study, and play. But something was wrong. The old *esprit de corps*, the old spirit of teamwork, was lacking. Not only on the football field, but also in the classroom, a rift was forming; on one side the Hillsdale students, on the other the boys and girls of Wintonville.

"I wish," Stretch Magens said bitterly, on the first Saturday afternoon of the term, "that the Wintonville schoolhouse had never burned down. Those other fellows have simply spoiled the whole year."

Ward glanced up curiously. Stretch, he had noticed, had been unusually quiet during the past week; on the football field, he had gone about his work grimly, without comment, but it seemed to Ward as if his eyes glowed with increasing resentment and that most of the bitterness which had characterized his attitude during the past year had returned. And Ward was just a bit disappointed in Stretch. In spite of Mr. Merritt's words about judging a man's to-morrow by his to-day, he found it hard not to remember that Stretch's yesterday had not been altogether satisfactory.

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"It won't do any good to blame the Wintonville crowd for what has happened," Bill Barrett declared generously. "They're here, and we've got to make the best of it."

Ward nodded in eager agreement. He had thought the thing all out since the term started, and he was very much ashamed of himself for his early attitude. He admitted that the Wintonville pupils were different, in many ways, from the Hillsdale crowd; that they had not had the advantage of home training, and that on the whole they were less polished than their more fortunate schoolmates. But after all, Ward argued, it was the man himself that counted, not his environment; and Joe Krasowski and his followers deserved a square deal, at least. That was what the American nation stood for; it was the basis of the democracy of which they were all so proud.

"It seems to me," he said, "that it's up to us to absorb the Wintonville bunch into the school; to make them a part of us."

It wasn't exactly the way he wanted to express it, but it was the best that he could do.

Stretch, however, only smiled cynically.

"A fine chance we have for that," he answered. "They don't *want* to be a part of Hillsdale."

"We'll have to *make* them want to," Ward said.

"Whatever else we say about them," Bill put in, "those Krasowski boys surely do know how to play football."

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"Joe especially," Ward agreed.

"It isn't Joe I'm worried about," Stretch announced. "It's Jed that's bothering me."

"Why?" Ward asked, although he knew the answer.

"Joe's already assured one of the ends," Stretch explained frankly, "and Jed's making a strong bid for the other position. And if he gets it, it means that I'll be only a substitute."

"You can be assured of one thing," Bill told him. "He won't get on unless he's a better man than you are."

"Yes, but I'm beginning to think that he *is* a better man."

They were silent for a moment, while Ward debated the advisability of saying anything more. Finally, he decided to ask Stretch a question.

"What are you going to do," he inquired, "if Jed beats you out?"

Stretch's eyes opened wide.

"I'll keep right on doing the best I can, of course," he answered. "What did you think I'd do—quit?"

"No," Ward announced hastily, "I didn't think you'd quit, Stretch."

But, at least, he had suspected that Stretch would; and the other boy's answer had thrilled him strangely. He knew, now, without semblance of doubt, that Stretch was going to come through. The old Hillsdale spirit was still strong within him.

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"I hope," he said quietly, "that you can beat out Jed Krasowski. Somehow, the team wouldn't be quite the same with you on the sidelines."

"Thanks!" Stretch said, and his lips shut grimly.

"The only thing to do," Bill Barrett declared, "is to keep on plugging, and let the coach decide."

On Monday morning, however, even Stretch's problem paled into insignificance before a new announcement which Coach Merritt made. The older man followed the team down to the locker room immediately after classes were dismissed, and when they were all dressed, he nodded to them gravely.

"I haven't said anything yet about training rules," he began, "but I want it understood, of course, that every man on the Hillsdale team must keep in perfect condition. None of you smoke, do you?"

For a moment, no one answered, and then Joe Krasowski cleared his throat.

"I do, once in a while," he announced bluntly. "And so does Jed."

Ward Jackson looked up wonderingly, and Coach Merritt winced.

"It's a bad habit for a young fellow to form," the older man announced casually, "and I want you to promise me, Joe, that you'll cut it out during football season."

"I promise," Joe answered without hesitation.

"How about you, Jed?"

"I suppose so." But Jed spoke indifferently, as if

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the matter were only of slight importance, anyhow; and the coach looked at him sharply.

But Mr. Merritt did not press the subject; instead, he turned to the team again, and regarded them thoughtfully.

"Have any of you men heard about the Honor System, which is in vogue at a number of colleges?" he asked.

Two or three of them nodded.

"Yes," Bill Barrett answered. "They have it at Princeton, haven't they?"

"It's been in operation there for a number of years. And now"—the coach's eyes held them—"we're going to adopt it for the Hillsdale football team."

The players looked up doubtfully, sensing the gravity of the occasion, but not quite understanding.

"Just what does it mean?" Ward asked.

"It means," Mr. Merritt told them, "that every man will be on his honor to give his best for the team, that he will not cut practice without a legitimate excuse, that he will not shirk in his work, either on or off the field; and that he will, of course, observe strict rules of training."

"We'll all be glad to do that," Bill Barrett said.

"Yes," the coach agreed, "but the Honor System is more than an indefinite agreement; it's a promise from every man."

"We'll give it," Ward assured him.

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"I think that you will; but first, you must understand the thing thoroughly. When a team adopts the Honor System it means that not only the individual members, but also the team as a whole is bound by it. And if any single player is false to the pledge he has taken, then it is the duty of the other players to report him to the coach. Do you understand?"

They nodded slowly, their eyes thoughtful.

"Does it mean," Ward asked, "that if one of us sees another fellow smoking, that it's up to us to report him?"

"Yes," the coach answered grimly, "that's what it means, Ward."

"That's squealing, isn't it?" the boy protested.

"No," the older man answered quietly. "You wouldn't call it squealing, would you, to report to the police a burglar who stole something from your house?"

"No," Ward admitted.

"Then the same line of reasoning applies to a man who has robbed the team—our team—of its honor."

Their eyes lighted understandingly at that.

"After we have given our pledge to support the Honor System," Bill Barrett declared, "there isn't a man among us, I know, who would be small enough to break it."

The others nodded in agreement; and impulsively, Ward glanced over to where Jed Krasowski was sit-

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ting. Jed was examining his headgear critically, and there was the hint of a smile about his lips.

"I move," Jim Andrews said, "that the Hillsdale football team adopt the Honor System."

"Second the motion," Ned Conrad called.

The coach held up his hand.

"All in favor say 'aye'," he directed.

A volume of sound greeted him.

"Opposed?"

No one spoke.

"The Honor System," the older man announced, "has been unanimously adopted. And the vote that each of you men has given is your pledge of support. Let's go out now for practice."

Gravely, with set lips, they followed Coach Merritt out upon the field; and the practice that afternoon was the best of the season.

As yet, the coach had made no effort to select a first or a second team; the work had been confined exclusively to extensive drills in the fundamentals until it seemed to some of the squad as if the season itself was going to be an endless round of falling on the ball, catching passes, and charging. Once Bill Barrett ventured to speak to Mr. Merritt about it.

"The fellows," he said, "are beginning to wonder if it isn't time for some scrimmage. The first game is only a week off, now, you know."

"Yes, I know." The older man smiled indulgently. "The trouble with the majority of the high school

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teams, Bill," he explained, "is that they spend most of their time practicing complicated formations when what they really need is a thorough drill in the basic principles of the game. But we're going to avoid that error at Hillsdale, if we can; and before we have a single minute of scrimmage, I want to be satisfied that every man on the squad knows how to tackle low and hit the line hard."

Bill nodded, recognizing the soundness of the coach's reasoning; and the next afternoon he slipped down in the basement between classes and posted a new motto on the walls of the locker room:

TACKLE LOW AND HIT THE LINE HARD
that's the slogan of the Hillsdale team.

When the others saw it later in the day, they regarded it gravely, but Jed Krasowski grinned openly.

"What's the big idea?" he asked. "After a while this place will look like a Sunday school room."

His brother Joe glanced over at him disapprovingly.

"Cut out the crabbing!" he snapped.

Mr. Merritt, entering at that moment, regarded the two brothers thoughtfully; and then, as his eyes found the newly posted notice, his face became grave.

"A motto like that," he said, "is a good thing to remember in the game of life as well as on the grid-iron. The man who tackles low and hits the line hard is generally the one who gets there."

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Silence greeted his words, and Jed Krasowski busied himself with a stubborn shoelace.

“The schedule,” Mr. Merritt announced, after a moment, “has just been approved by the faculty. Like to hear it?”

The team looked up eagerly.

“Sure!” Ward answered.

“It goes like this,” the coach told them:

October 6—Tanwood at home

October 13—Lincoln at home

October 20—Milltown at Milltown

October 27—Jamesburg at home

November 3—Valley Brook at home

November 10—Somerset at home

November 17—Winston at Winston

“That’s a good schedule,” Jim Andrews announced, when the coach had finished speaking. “Only two games away from home.”

“It’s too bad,” Bill declared, “that we have to play our last game at Winston. But they came here last year, you know.”

“What difference does it make where we play?” Joe Krasowski asked.

“None, I suppose,” Bill answered. “But Winston’s our big rival, and naturally we’d like to have them come here.”

“Why don’t they?”

“It’s our turn to go to Winston. That’s only fair, you know.”

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“Humph!”

“It’s a good schedule,” the coach put in, “and four of the games are county championship contests. We want to win them if we can.”

“We’ve *got* to win them,” Ward told him.

The older man smiled a bit at his vehemence.

“Winning or losing, we must play the game,” he quoted. Then he turned to the others. “All out, men,” he ordered. “Scrimmage this afternoon.”

They followed him eagerly out of the building, curious to find out who would be selected for the first team.

“Let’s go!” Bill Barrett urged them, clapping his hands. “How about the line-up, Coach?”

“On the first team,” Mr. Merritt announced slowly, “we’ll put Chubby Bates at center, Mel Chalmers and Dave Mullison at guards, Andrews and Fritzinger tackles. On the ends, Joe Krasowski and Stretch. The quarterback will be Foulds, Barrett and Conrad halfbacks, Ward fullback. Run through your signals, you men, while I pick out a second team.”

Eager-eyed, the members of the varsity dug their cleats into the yielding turf and dashed out upon the field. Ward Jackson, swinging into his old position at fullback, found time to glance at Stretch Magens. Stretch’s thin face was wreathed in smiles and his eyes were shining happily. Over his shoulder, he looked at Ward, and winked.

“Signals!” Doc Foulds called huskily.

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For almost a half hour, Coach Merritt permitted them to run through their formations, while he busied himself with the second squad. But finally he called the two teams together.

“I want the varsity to take the ball on the forty-yard line and push it over, if they can,” he directed. “Let’s see you go.”

The varsity pushed it over without much difficulty, although Jed Krasowski, at right end for the scrubs, proved to be a tower of strength on defense. Long before the scrimmage was ended, Ward found himself regarding Jed with wondering eyes. In his heart of hearts, Ward knew that the boy from Wintonville was a better end than Stretch Magens.

Apparently, the coach thought so, too, for when the line-up for the first game with Tanwood was announced on Friday afternoon, Jed Krasowski was listed at right end on the varsity in place of Stretch.

And Stretch, reading the line-up in the locker room following practice, said never a word.

But Ward Jackson found himself wondering a bit. He was disappointed, of course, because Stretch would not start the Tanwood game; but as he glanced across the room into the triumphant eyes of Jed Krasowski, he was conscious of something stronger than disappointment. A vague feeling of uneasiness crept over him; and he remembered, suddenly, the indifference with which Jed had greeted the coach’s suggestion that the team adopt the Honor System.

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"Last year, when we played Tanwood," Jim Andrews announced, "they had a right guard who was a regular prize fighter."

"I remember him," Bill Barrett said. "He was cautioned, once, for rough playing."

"He did more than that, though," Jim continued. "During one of the mass formations, he slugged me squarely on the jaw."

"Supposing he does it to-morrow?" some one asked.

Jim held up for inspection a gnarled fist.

"See that?"

Joe Krasowski grinned.

"Know how to use it?" he asked.

"You bet I do."

Coach Merritt cleared his throat.

"When I was on the college football team," he declared evenly, "we had a center who was as hard as wire nails and who could hit like Jack Dempsey. He was an aggressive fellow, too, and in his freshman year he was twice ejected from games because of slugging. But he always maintained that he never hit a man unless that man hit him first."

"Fair enough!" Joe Krasowski said.

"And after he made the varsity," the coach continued, "he was put out of the first game for slugging."

"Must have been *some* boy!"

"But for the remaining three years," Mr. Merritt

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concluded, "he played in every contest from whistle to whistle."

The members of the Hillsdale team regarded the Coach thoughtfully.

"How did that happen?" Bill Barrett asked.

"It's a long story," Mr. Merritt answered.

"Let's hear it."

Two or three of the boys who had stood up preparatory to leaving sat down again. The older man settled himself on one of the wooden benches and clasped his hands around his knees.

"We'll call him Jack Smith, although that wasn't his real name," the coach suggested. "He was, as you can imagine, a brute of a boy, the product of a small high school, who had come to college without any idea of the dignity which a college man should possess and with no idea whatever of the ethics of intercollegiate sport. In his freshman year, he got away with a good deal of rough stuff because a lot of his team mates were in just about the same boat. But when he made the varsity, he stacked up against a different proposition."

The coach paused for a moment, and two or three of the boys in front of him nodded eagerly.

"Because he was big and strong and really knew how to play football," Mr. Merritt continued, "he was given a chance as varsity center in sophomore year. The first game was against Brentwood, a small college which didn't have a chance in the world against us.

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But as far as Smith was concerned, it might just as well have been the most important contest event of the year. He went into each scrimmage with eyes blazing; and after about five minutes of play, a couple of us in the backfield saw him draw back his fist and strike his opponent squarely in the eye. The referee saw it also and sent him to the sidelines without a moment's hesitation.

"But Smith protested vehemently.

" 'He hit me first,' he declared angrily. 'And if you think—'

"He turned to the rest of us for confirmation, but not a man on the team so much as glanced at him. Mumbling, he shuffled off the field.

"But the head coach was waiting for him.

" 'Smith,' he announced grimly, 'go into the field house and don't show your face around here for a week.'

" 'What have I done?' Smith demanded resentfully. 'He—'

" 'The thing you've done,' the coach told him evenly, 'is to break one of the rules of the college Honor System.' "

Mr. Merritt, having finished his story, leaned back against the wall and waited.

Bill Barrett was the first to speak.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that at college the Honor System covers a thing like that?"

"Yes," the older man told him, "the Honor Sys-

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tem requires every member of any team to play the game according to the rules. Just as in examinations, he wouldn't cheat, so in football he plays fair and square."

"I didn't look at it in quite that way before," Bill admitted.

"The Honor System," the older man continued, "is one of the finest things that has ever been devised." His eyes shone with enthusiasm. "Down at college it embraces almost every act that a student performs. He is required on his honor to return borrowed books to the library, to hand in his athletic uniforms, to write his own essays, to give the real reasons for his absence from classes. And as a result, every man in college is honest—and every man plays the game."

There was a moment of silence before Mr. Merritt spoke again.

"And it's that very same system that we've adopted for the Hillsdale football team," he announced quietly. "Our pledge of honor demands that we play like gentlemen, and that we require our teammates to do likewise. And if any fellow here is false to the pledge he has given, then the rest of us are expected to hold him to his word. *For honor is bigger than victory, and the Honor System bigger than the team itself.*"

"I see it now," Bill Barrett said.

The others nodded gravely, their eyes thoughtful. But Jed Krasowski continued to inspect his headgear

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—and a faint smile played about the corners of his mouth.

“How about Smith?” Mel Chalmers asked.

“He remained off the field for a week,” the coach answered, “and then reported again. But for another ten days, not a fellow on the team spoke a word to him; and at the end of that period, the varsity captain called him aside and gave him a printed copy of the constitution of the Honor System. After that, Smith never slugged again.”

“Great stuff!” Ward declared huskily.

Jed Krasowski, his face inscrutable, looked over at Jim Andrews.

“What are you going to do,” he demanded, “if that Tanwood guard slugs you one to-morrow?”

“Nothing!” Jim answered evenly.

The others nodded in eager agreement; but Jed Krasowski only smiled.

CHAPTER XIV

SMOKING

AT two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, the Hillsdale squad reported to Coach Merritt in the locker room. Ward Jackson, dressing slowly, glanced with curious interest at his team mates and wondered whether the approaching contest would be the harbinger of a winning or a losing season. He expected little trouble with Tanwood; the opposing school was a small one and its teams had never been especially strong. But there were other games to come; games which would tax their strength to its utmost and test their courage. But whatever happened, Ward was sure of one thing: winning or losing, they must play the game. The spirit of Hillsdale would not permit them to do otherwise.

Nevertheless, he glanced rather doubtfully at the two Krasowski brothers, and at "Fritz" Fritzinger, the sturdy lineman who had won a place at right tackle. Those men were as yet unknown quantities; good football players, to be sure, but untried in the heat of battle. Of Fritzinger, Ward had little doubt; the new tackle was a stolid boy, slow-moving but powerful, and there was no questioning his courage. He

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played hard and clean, with a grim tenacity of purpose which, somehow, communicated itself to his fellows, inspired them with some of the dogged persistence which was his one outstanding characteristic. Fritz, Ward decided, was a good man, the kind they wanted on a Hillsdale team.

Of the Krasowski brothers, however, he was not so sure. Joe, he felt, was the stronger of the two, both morally and physically. Ward liked the way he had adopted the suggestions of the coach, liked the instinctive fighting spirit he had displayed during practice scrimmage. But with Jed, it was a different matter. The younger brother seemed to lack stolidity, failed, for some reason or other, to merge his own play into the general play of the team. He gave Ward the impression of placing his own ends above the good of the school.

Still, the team as a whole gave promise of future victories. It was as yet in the early stages of progress, its formations crudely executed, its teamwork undeveloped, but its fundamentals were sound and its fighting spirit unquestioned.

"And the right kind of spirit," Ward told himself grimly, "will carry us a long ways."

When he finished his own dressing, he waited until the others were ready. Coach Merritt, his face impassive, walked quietly from one player to another, adjusting a strap here, giving a brief word of advice there. There was something about his quiet presence

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which instilled confidence more than words could have done. And finally, when the last shoulder guard had been fitted into place, he gathered the team around him.

"Fellows," he said, "I don't think that we'll have any trouble in beating Tanwood. But I want you all to do your best, nevertheless, and to play hard and clean." His thin lips parted in a wistful smile. "And, winning or losing," he added, "we must play the game."

When they dashed out upon the field in the wake of Captain Bill Barrett, the Hillsdale rooters rose in their places in the north stand and greeted them with the long locomotive yell. Ward Jackson, searching the crowd with eager eyes, hunted in vain for the Wintonville rooters.

"Where's your own crowd?" he asked Jed Krasowski.

"They didn't bother to come up," Jed told him. "It would have cost them something to hire the buses."

Ward's face clouded.

"Pretty poor spirit," he said.

"Bunk!" Jed answered, and turned away.

Throughout the game, the absence of the Wintonville students bothered Ward. To his way of thinking, it was an affront to the team, an insult to Hillsdale. Somehow, the knowledge of their failure inspired his own playing; he charged at the Tanwood

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line with lowered head and straining muscles, tearing large holes in the opposing team's defense, fighting his way forward with a ferocity that resulted in a brace of touchdowns.

Between the halves, Bill Barrett looked over at him affectionately.

"Old Ward's a regular Ted Coy," he remarked. "Nothing can stop him."

"In the second half," Coach Merritt told them, "we're going to make some changes. Magens will go in at right end, and Minton at tackle in place of Fritzinger."

Jed Krasowski glanced up resentfully.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Haven't I been playing all right?"

"Yes," the coach answered quietly, "but we want to give some one else a chance."

"I notice," Jed muttered, "that it's two Wintonville men you're taking out."

The older man made no reply, only looked down at Jed unwaveringly; but there was something in his steady eyes which Jed's sullen gaze could not meet.

The talk turned then to details of play; but just before the intermission ended, Mr. Merritt turned to Jed again.

"We won't need you any more to-day," he said. "You might just as well take off your uniform."

Jed started to say something in angry protest, thought better of it, and nodded moodily.

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“All out!” Bill Barrett snapped.

Ward noticed, as the game progressed, that Stretch Magens was playing beyond himself. Twice during the third quarter he snatched forward passes which Bill hurled at him, and dashed down the field for long gains. He was, Ward admitted, slightly weaker than Jed Krasowski on the defense, but his offensive work was excellent, the outstanding feature, in fact, of the Hillsdale attack. Stretch's great height was a big aid to him in the forward passing game; and before the final whistle blew, he had covered himself with glory. Once the school cheering section gave him a special yell, all for himself.

But when they dressed leisurely in the locker room after the contest, Stretch talked impersonally, and from the standpoint of the team. Ward wondered hopefully if the coach had noticed. After all, it was the team that counted. And he wondered, too, if Mr. Merritt had not been aware of the absence of the Wintonville students. Something, he argued, ought to be done about that.

On Monday morning, however, the principal set Ward's doubts at rest.

“I would like to have the girls and boys from Wintonville remain after assembly,” he announced. “The other pupils may go to classes.”

From his place in the English room across the corridor, Ward could hear Mr. Merritt's quiet voice, but the words were indistinguishable. He knew, how-

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ever, that the principal was talking about school spirit, about the unity of the student body, and the danger of factions. He wished that he could know exactly what was said; but he was forced to content himself with his own assurance that the principal was capable of handling the situation in the best possible way. When the meeting was over and the Wintonville pupils filed out of the auditorium, Ward searched their faces and found there something which he had not glimpsed before.

Joe Krasowski mentioned the subject before practice that afternoon.

"The Coach," he said, "gave us the razz for not having any school spirit. And the Wintonville bunch has decided to attend the Lincoln game in a body."

"Good!" Bill Barrett told him. "How about the buses?"

"We're going to chip in and pay for them."

Ward smiled, and just when his grin was broadest, Jed Krasowski happened to look up.

"The Coach must have hypnotized them," he said sullenly. "They won't get any of *my* money for their joy rides."

"I'll pay double," Joe announced.

Bill Barrett, walking across the room, laid a careless hand on Joe's muscled shoulder.

"Good stuff!" he said. "Let's get out to practice."

Ward was curious to see if Stretch Magens would be placed at end on the varsity, but there was no

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scrimmage that afternoon; and when the first team lined up for signals, the Coach kept both Joe Krasowski and Ward out of the drill, with Stretch at one end and Jed at the other. But on Tuesday, when scrimmage work was resumed, the Krasowski boys were both placed on the varsity, while Stretch paced the sidelines moodily.

At noon the next day, when he had occasion to visit the principal's office, Ward asked the Coach about it.

"Stretch," he said, "is pretty much disappointed about not making the team. Is he off for good?"

"No," Mr. Merritt answered gravely. "All positions are open, Ward."

"But it seems to me," the boy persisted, "that Stretch played a wonderful game on Saturday."

"He did, offensively; but his defensive work wasn't up to standard." The older man hesitated for a moment. "Just between you and me, Ward," he said, "I'd like to see Stretch make first-string end. But in a way, it will be just as good for him if he doesn't."

"How?"

"It will temper his character, teach him to take his medicine without whining."

"He hasn't whined yet," Ward declared loyally.

"And I don't think he will. And that, Ward, is the best part of it all."

The boy wasn't quite sure that he understood all that the Coach wanted him to, but at least he sensed his meaning. Ward still hoped, though, that Stretch

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would make the team. He wondered if there was any way in which he could help out.

"How goes it?" he asked Stretch in the locker room that afternoon.

"Pretty good," the other boy answered casually. His brown eyes looked questioningly into Ward's blue ones. "I'm finding it pretty hard," he said whimsically, "to convince the Coach that I'm an All-American football player."

Ward wanted to say something, to tell Stretch to keep on trying with all that was in him; but other players wandered down to the locker room at that moment.

"I'm with you, Stretch," he whispered guardedly, and went over to his own locker.

He noticed that Jed Krasowski made no effort to change into football togs, but stood idly by the door, his hands deep in his trousers pockets. When Mr. Merritt came in, Jed turned to him blandly.

"I'd like to be excused from practice this afternoon, Coach," he said.

"Why?"

"A friend of mine down in Wintonville has a boat which he wants to bring home from Seagate, and I'd like to go with him. It will be all right, won't it?"

"No," the Coach answered unexpectedly. "We need you on the field to-day, Jed."

The boy's eyes lighted angrily.

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"I don't see what difference a single afternoon will make," he protested.

"To every member of the Hillsdale squad," Mr. Merritt announced quietly, "the team must come first and other things afterward. We pledged our word to that when we adopted the Honor System."

"And I can't go, then?"

"No."

"And if I do?"

It was Joe Krasowski who answered.

"Don't be a dumb-bell," he announced caustically. "You're going to stay right here and practice."

"Oh, I am, hey?"

"Yes."

The two brothers looked defiantly into each other's eyes, and Jed's were the first to turn away.

"I'll come," he conceded sullenly. "But it seems to me you're all making a lot of fuss about it."

"That's school spirit," Ward told him.

Jed looked up angrily.

"Bosh!" he said.

"We'll be waiting for you outside, Jed," Coach Merritt announced quietly. "All out, men!"

Just before the varsity players took their positions, Ward grinned into the somber eyes of Captain Bill Barrett.

"Joe's all right," he whispered.

"Yes," Bill answered, "they'll both come through, I guess."

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But even as he spoke, his glance rested speculatively upon the figure of Stretch Magens, who was crouching at the end of the forward line. Later in the day, however, Jed replaced Stretch on the varsity.

As the week advanced, the team began to find itself, smoothing off its rough edges, perfecting its formations, absorbing more and more of the Coach's patient teachings. Barring accidents, it promised to develop into one of the greatest teams that had ever represented Hillsdale.

On Thursday afternoon, Bill Barrett and Ward lingered in the locker room after the others had gone. The practice that day had been a hard one, with more than an hour of scrimmage, and they were both tired.

"We've never been worked like this before," Ward said, stretching luxuriously on one of the wooden benches. "But it's a good thing for all of us."

"It sure is," the other boy agreed. "We ought to have a fine chance for the county championship, Ward."

"Yes, if no one gets hurt." Ward was silent for a moment. "Stretch has been on the sidelines most of the time this week," he said finally. "I'm afraid he isn't going to make it, Bill."

"Jed sure does seem to have something on him," the captain agreed. "But Stretch is all right, Ward, and the two of us will root hard for him, anyhow."

"All the Hillsdale fellows will," Ward answered. "And if—"

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He looked up and saw Joe Krasowski standing in the doorway. Joe's fists were clenched at his sides, and his eyes glowed angrily.

"I just happened to drop in for a book I'd forgotten," he explained. Then his lips curled. "Wasn't it you that told me," he asked, looking fairly at Bill Barrett, "that every member of the squad would have a square chance to make the team?"

"Yes," Bill answered, "that's what I said."

"I'm beginning to think," Joe continued evenly, "that that kind of stuff is all bosh. What chance has Jed when the captain of the team is trying to give his own friend the job?"

"I didn't—" Bill began.

"I just heard you," Joe interrupted angrily. Suddenly, his voice grew husky and a wave of red crept over his usually stolid face. "You lay off on Jed," he warned them. "He's forgotten more football than Magens ever knew."

"Oh, I say!" Bill protested.

But Joe turned and slammed the door after him.

"He's got us wrong," Ward announced, when his footsteps had died away down the corridor. "We didn't mean, of course, that Jed wouldn't get a square deal."

"I'm sorry this thing's happened, though," Bill answered worriedly. "They're brothers, you know; and blood is thicker than water."

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"We'll explain to Joe to-morrow," Ward decided. "There isn't any need to worry about it."

"Maybe not," Bill agreed.

But even as he spoke, a picture of Joe's angry eyes flashed before him.

On the next morning, however, Ward had other things to think about, and, for the time being, the matter slipped his mind. He had, two weeks previous, invited both Tony Cuppola and Curly Lockwood to visit him at Hillsdale; and although Curly could not make it, Tony arrived bright and early.

Ward, Stretch, and Bill, meeting him at the station, greeted him as a long-lost brother.

"You old boob!" Stretch said affectionately. "How goes the battle, anyhow?"

The beaming Tony looked up with puzzled eyes.

"What battle?" he asked gravely.

They guffawed at that, of course, picked up the visitor bodily and carried him to Ward's waiting car.

"We're going to show you a real football team this afternoon," Stretch told him. "Know anything about the game?"

"Not much," Tony answered. "But I would like to see it."

"And will you yell for Hillsdale?"

"Of course."

"What you ought to do," Stretch said, "is to live out here."

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"I'd like to," Tony answered. "But I have friends in the city, too."

At Ward's house, they all hurried inside to introduce their guest to Mrs. Jackson. Tony, grinning shyly, voiced his pleasure in formal tones; and Ward's mother, smiling at his gravity, made him feel at home at once.

"I want Ward to drive down to Wintonville on an errand," she said. "The rest of you will go along, I suppose."

But both Stretch and Bill shook their heads.

"I've promised to cut the grass," Stretch announced. "But maybe——"

"No, sir!" Ward broke in. "It's up to you to keep your promise, old Top."

"And I've got to clean up the cellar," Bill said.

"It's just the two of us then." Ward turned to Tony. "Don't mind trusting yourself to me, do you?"

"Not at all," Tony assured him.

They started off at ten o'clock for the short trip to Wintonville. There was a lot to talk about, and they chatted happily, while the engine purred smoothly and the big car glided easily over the concrete road.

"At my school," Tony explained, "there are so many people that we do not know each other well. We have a football team, but the players are strangers, and they do not recognize me when we pass on the

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street. But we have good school spirit, and we win most of our games.”

“Ever see any of the fellows from Pinetree?”

“I have visited two or three in the city.” Tony’s eyes grew wistful. “I am going to go back next year,” he added, “and try to help my camp win the swimming meet.”

Smiling, Ward relapsed into silence. Tony, he reflected, was the same loyal, unspoiled boy he had been during the summer. It occurred to Ward, suddenly, that during the last few months his own contacts had been many and varied. He had met new fellows in camp, and now, with the Wintonville students at Hillsdale, he was being thrown in contact with still another group. First, there was Tony Cupola, then the Krasowski boys—foreigners, whose parents had been born in foreign lands but who were bringing up their sons to be Americans. And just as Tony, in his quiet, unassuming way, stood for the highest ideals of American manhood, so Jed and Joe Krasowski, Ward told himself, would finally absorb the spirit of fair play which was characteristic of the nation of their adoption.

“We’ve got a couple of fellows in school I’d like to have you meet,” he announced. “They——”

Suddenly he stopped. The machine had reached the center of Wintonville, and as Ward turned it into the main street, he discovered the figure of Jed Kra-

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sowski standing idly on one corner. And at the sight of the other boy Ward's eyes opened wide. For Jed was smoking a cigarette, openly, brazenly, without any attempt at concealment. And Jed had pledged his honor to abide by the rules of the team.

"I've got to stop here," Ward said to Tony. "I'll be through, though, in a couple of minutes."

CHAPTER XV

A QUESTION OF HONOR

WARD drew his car up to the curb and stepped out; and as he did so, Jed Krasowski plucked the cigarette from his lips, and waited.

“Hello, Jed!”

The Wintonville boy nodded indifferently.

“What are you doing down here?” he said.

“Just happened to be passing through town on an errand, and I saw you.”

“Welcome to Wintonville!” Jed spoke lightly, but there was defiance in his voice.

“You’re smoking,” Ward told him bluntly.

The other boy regarded his lighted cigarette with exaggerated concern.

“Why, so I am!” he remarked casually. “You’re getting to be quite a detective, Jackson.”

Ward never liked to be called by his last name, and Jed’s attitude irritated him beyond measure.

“You know, don’t you,” he asked, “that it’s against the rules?”

“What rules?”

“The rules of the football team.”

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"Is it?" Jed inquired arrogantly. "I haven't thought much about it one way or another."

Ward's anger increased.

"When you voted for the Honor System," he announced crisply, "you gave your pledge that you wouldn't break training in any way. Doesn't your word mean anything?"

"I didn't vote for the Honor System," Jed declared. "Never even opened my mouth either way."

"But the team adopted it," Ward argued, "and as a member of the team you're bound by it."

Jed smiled unpleasantly.

"All right," he said, "supposing we let it go at that. What are you going to do about it?"

To Ward's honest habit of thought, there was only one thing to do.

"Report you," he answered.

Jed's heavy face clouded.

"Do you mean to tell me you'd squeal?" he demanded.

"Of course I would. It's part of the pledge to report any man who—who isn't honorable enough to keep his word."

"Piffle!"

"It isn't piffle." Ward's blue eyes glowed angrily. "You're cheating, Jed," he declared bluntly. "And you've got to take your medicine."

The other boy flipped his cigarette into the gutter,

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thrust his hands into his pockets and faced Ward defiantly.

“Let’s get this thing straight,” he suggested. “You came spying around down here and found me smoking. It isn’t going to hurt my football playing, and isn’t doing anybody any real harm. But just because you took some fool pledge, you’re going to run to the Coach like a big kid and squeal on me. Is that it?”

“No, that isn’t it,” Ward answered quietly. “The facts are more like this: You gave your word of honor that you wouldn’t smoke; *I* gave *my* word that I’d report any one I saw smoking. And I’m going to keep it.”

“You won’t dare.”

“Why?”

“Because the team needs me on end. By saying anything, you’d only hurt the team.”

Ward hesitated for a moment, and then shook his head.

“No,” he answered finally, “it’s you who are hurting the team.”

“And you’re going to squeal?”

“I’m going to report you, just as I would any one who did something dishonest.”

A slow wave of crimson crept up to the roots of Jed Krasowski’s hair, and his lips curled.

“You make me sick,” he said, “with your line about honor and that kind of stuff. You know as well as I do that the only reason you’re going to re-

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port me is that Magens will get my place at end."

Ward's eyes opened wide at that. He had forgotten about Stretch.

"Magens hasn't anything to do with it," he declared quietly. "I'd do the same thing to him if I caught him smoking."

"Yes, you would!"

They stood for a moment, their eyes angry, challenging.

"I suppose you've considered about Joe and Fritzing?" Jed asked.

"What about them?"

"They won't stand for it. They'll quit the team if I do. Joe knows already that you and Barrett are working for Magens."

"Does he know you're smoking?" Ward asked suddenly.

"No; but even if he did, he wouldn't say anything."

"I'm not so sure about that. Joe's square."

"Meaning that I'm not?"

"You've been breaking training," Ward answered simply.

"And you're still going to squeal?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead then." Jed turned away. "But you'll be sorry," he added grimly.

"I'm sorry now," Ward told him.

But Jed walked down the street without answering, his head held high. Ward, climbing into the car,

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smiled uncertainly at the curious Tony, and proceeded on his errand. His clear eyes were clouded, and his heart felt like a lump of lead in his breast.

On the way home, he thought the matter out. He hated to be a squealer; it went against his grain, somehow, to report any other man for an infringement of rules. But he had given his word, had pledged his honor. And honor to Ward was a sacred thing.

He knew, without questioning, that the team would be behind him in anything that he did. The school, too, would understand; at least that part of the school which had grasped the real Hillsdale spirit. They had already accepted the fundamental truth that to play fair in all things was more to be desired than victory. Mr. Merritt had taught them that.

With the Wintonville students, however, it was a different matter. They had not been at Hillsdale long enough to absorb the spirit of their fellow students, and the dropping of Jed Krasowski from the team would be bound to arouse bitterness. In that case the school would be divided again. Ward asked himself anxiously if, after all, the bigger end might not be served by keeping still?

But he could not do that. He had given his word, and he would be a quitter if he did not speak. It was hard lines, though, just when things were going so well.

Then, too, there was the case of Stretch Magens.

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Some of the students, those from Wintonville especially, would accept Jed's version of things, would say that Ward had reported Jed so that Stretch could make the team. Joe Krasowski would probably believe it, might even quit himself and take Fritzinger with him. And then the county championship would be lost irrevocably. Ward sighed unhappily. Things sure were in a mess.

Tony, who had heard only snatches of the conversation between him and Jed, made no attempt to break in upon Ward's thoughts. Something had happened, he knew, and he wanted to help if he could; but he kept silent until finally Ward drew the car to a halt, and led his guest to the shaded porch of his home.

After they had seated themselves on the porch, Ward turned to the other boy with questioning eyes.

"That was Jed Krasowski I was talking to down at Wintonville," he explained. "Jed's one of the best players on the team."

"But you were arguing about something."

"Yes. Jed was smoking a cigarette, and that's against the rules."

"And you told him not to?"

"I told him I was going to report him."

"Why?" Tony asked.

"Because every man on the squad pledged his honor to abide by the rules," Ward answered. "And Jed broke his word."

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"And will it mean that he'll have to get off?"

"I think so."

"That's too bad," Tony said.

"It's worse than that," Ward announced grimly.

"It's a tragedy."

"Why?"

"We need him at end."

"But haven't you any substitutes?"

"One. Stretch Magens."

"And—and Stretch will be on the team, then, if you report Jed Krasowski?"

"Yes," Ward answered, "and the fellows from Wintonville will say that I reported Jed just to give Stretch his chance."

Frowning, Tony relapsed into silence; but after a time, he spoke again.

"Even if they do say that," he suggested, "you can tell them that Jed was unfaithful to his trust."

"Yes," Ward answered cynically, "but they might not believe that *that* was my *real* reason."

"If they know you as well as I do," Tony declared gravely, "they couldn't possibly believe anything else."

"Thanks, Tony!" Ward stood up and thrust his hands deep into his trousers' pockets. His lips set resolutely and his eyes lost their questioning. Somehow, Tony's words had showed him that there was only one course for him to take.

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"I'm going to report Jed," he announced slowly, "and let the chips fall where they may."

He reached the high school building early that afternoon, and found Mr. Merritt ahead of him. Into the older man's ears he poured the whole miserable tale; and when he had finished, the Coach nodded understandingly.

"It's too bad, Ward," he said quietly. "Jed was a mighty good end."

"And you're going to drop him?"

The older man's jaws clicked.

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"I'm afraid," Ward declared miserably, "that I've hurt the team a good deal."

"But not nearly so much as if you had kept still." Mr. Merritt's eyes were kind. "The Honor System, Ward," he said, "is bigger than any man, bigger than the team itself. Without honor, victory would be a hollow thing." Suddenly he held out his hand. "I'd like to shake on it," he offered. "You've done a bigger thing than you realize."

"Thanks!"

The older man turned then and looked thoughtfully through the window facing the football field.

"We'll simply keep Jed on the sidelines this afternoon," he said, after a time. "And when the game's over, we'll give him a hearing."

"It will be better that way," Ward agreed.

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Other players came in, eager-eyed and zestful, unmindful of the cloud which hung over them.

"We ought to be able to beat Lincoln by thirty points," Bill Barrett declared. "They're no heavier than we are, and they haven't had our coaching."

"We can beat them," Mr. Merritt answered, "but only by giving our best."

"We'll do that," Jim Andrews promised.

"The same team will start as started in the Tanwood game," the Coach announced, "with the exception of Magens at right end in place of Jed Krasowski."

The deposed player, who had dressed sulkily in one corner of the room, glanced keenly at Ward Jackson, but said nothing. But his brother Joe, looking fairly into Bill Barrett's puzzled eyes, smiled knowingly.

"I hope you're satisfied," he muttered.

Bill did not answer. He had no idea of the reason for the change; Jed, he thought, had done unusually well during the past week, and he could not understand. But he accepted the word of the Coach without question.

When they trotted out upon the field, Ward noticed that the Wintonville pupils had kept their promise to attend. They did not even sit by themselves, but were distributed among the other Hillsdale rooters. That, Ward told himself, was as it should be, but he

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wondered about the next week. With Jed Krasowski off, would they still support the team?

When the game began, however, Ward forgot his problem in the thrill of actual combat. As Bill had prophesied, Lincoln offered no serious opposition, and in the first five minutes Hillsdale marched the length of the field for a touchdown. Ward kicked goal, and the score was seven to nothing.

Once more in the initial period, and twice in the second quarter, they scored again. Their formations worked more smoothly than during the preceding game, the men seemed to be finding themselves. There were fewer missed tackles, the line played low, and the offense worked like a well-oiled machine. Ward, plunging exultantly through guard, visioned a county championship for the first time in many years. Nothing, not even Winston, he told himself, could stop them.

In the locker room between halves, Joe Krasowski glanced curiously at the Coach.

"Jed going in next half?" he asked casually.

The older man shook his head.

"The team's going well as it is," he answered.

But twice during the next period, Stretch Magens missed easy forward passes when to catch them would have meant a touchdown. He was, Ward decided, too eager to prove himself, to justify Mr. Merritt's confidence in him. Under other circumstances, Stretch would surely have been taken out; but the

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game continued, and he remained at right end for the varsity. Joe Krasowski, his own play beyond criticism, glanced questioningly toward the substitutes' bench and muttered under his breath. Even Bill Barrett wondered why the Coach did not send Jed in. But the final whistle blew with Jed still on the sidelines.

The team dressed slowly, happy in the knowledge of another well-earned victory. But finally, when two or three of the players prepared to leave the room, Coach Merritt held up his hand.

"I have something to say to you," he announced quietly. "One of our men has broken the rules of training."

The members of the squad looked up in stunned amazement, and Captain Bill Barrett cleared his throat nervously.

"Who?" he asked.

"Jed."

Joe Krasowski turned angry eyes to his brother.

"Did you?" he demanded.

"I smoked," Jed answered defiantly, "but I don't see anything so awful about it."

"How did you hear?" Bill asked.

Mr. Merritt told the facts briefly, sparing no one.

"Now that Jed's acknowledged it," he said, "it's up to the team to fix the punishment."

They were silent for a moment; then Jim Andrews spoke.

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"Drop him," he suggested bluntly.

Jed's lips framed themselves in angry protest, but his brother's clear gaze silenced him.

"It seems the only thing to do," Mr. Merritt said slowly. "The success of the Honor System lies in the balance."

"I so move," Mel Chalmers offered.

"Second the motion."

The older man turned to Bill Barrett.

"Will you call the roll, Captain?" he asked formally.

Each of the players voted "yes" until Magens' name was called.

"I'd rather not vote," Stretch declared.

They respected his attitude and passed on.

"Joe Krasowski?"

"Yes," Joe answered.

"Fritzinger?"

"Yes."

Ward drew a sigh of infinite relief. The Wintonville players had come through.

He hardly listened to the remainder of the roll-call; but when the last name had been read, Coach Merritt turned gravely to the squad.

"By the vote of his team mates," he announced, "Jed Krasowski has been dropped from the Hillsdale squad. This afternoon, Jed, we will expect you to hand in your uniform."

"You can have your old suit," Jed declared an-

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grily, his fists clenched at his sides. "But I'm through—through with the whole bunch of you."

Drawing on his coat, he stamped indignantly out of the room. When he had gone, Joe Krasowski turned unexpectedly to Ward.

"I'm sticking to the team," he said grimly, "because I gave my word. But I have my own personal opinion of a dirty squealer, and some time, Jackson, I'm going to get back at you for what you've done."

"That will do," Mr. Merritt put in sharply.

"It goes," Joe answered.

After a moment of tense silence, he followed his brother out of the locker room.

CHAPTER XVI

PLAYING THE GAME

THE attitude of Joe Krasowski was entirely outside of Ward Jackson's understanding.

"He voted to drop Jed from the team," Ward told Bill Barrett wonderingly. "And then, after admitting that I'm right, he threatens to get back at me."

"It sure is funny," Bill agreed. "I guess he thought that it was wrong for Jed to smoke, but that you were also wrong in reporting him. His mind's twisted, somehow."

"Joe's a good scout," Ward admitted generously. "But he's stubborn, and it takes him a long time to think things out. Maybe he'll come around after a while."

"There isn't anything he can do to you, though."

Ward dismissed the possibility with a gesture.

"It isn't that that's worrying me," he said. "It's the team."

"The team will come thorough all right," Bill asserted confidently.

"And the school?" Ward asked.

Bill hadn't thought of that.

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"We'll have to wait and see," he answered finally.

The school, it developed on Monday morning, took sides at once, as Ward had feared. The Hillsdale pupils, knowing Ward Jackson and his rugged honesty, accepted the verdict of the team without question. Jed Krasowski had promised not to smoke, had broken his promise, and had been dropped from the squad. That was all there was to it.

But the girls and boys from Wintonville looked at the matter in a different light. Joe Krasowski had remained moodily silent, but Jed had told them his side of the question, had insinuated that he had been dropped simply to make room for Stretch Magens. It was a general conspiracy, he contended, to make the team a distinctly Hillsdale affair, and he would not be at all surprised if both Joe and Fritzinger were eventually relegated to the sidelines. Naturally, his friends resented the implied discrimination, and declared openly that in the future they would stick by themselves. Hillsdale had never meant anything to them, anyhow.

Wisely, Mr. Merritt let the matter drift for a few days, until the edge of the bitterness had worn away. But on Friday afternoon, he announced that the entire last period would be turned over to the student body for a mass meeting; and at two-thirty they all filed into the auditorium to sing and cheer for the football team.

The principal himself led the cheering, injecting

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into each succeeding yell some of his own staunch spirit, breaking through the studied indifference of the Wintonville pupils by the very strength of his personality. Gradually, their lukewarm attitude underwent a change, until finally, when the entire school stood up and sang "Old Hillsdale High," even Joe Krasowski added his own husky voice to the volume of sound.

Just before they went away, Mr. Merritt mentioned the Milltown game.

"It's our first big test of the season," he said quietly, "and the school should be in back of us. We will take the one-twenty train from Hillsdale, and I would like to see a record crowd of rooters accompany the team. Our loyalty, I know, will not fail us."

He did not ask for a rising vote of confidence, did not exact any promise of support; but as the students filed out of the auditorium, Ward Jackson knew by the light in their eyes that the team would have its full quota of followers.

The effect of the meeting was apparent among the players themselves on the field that afternoon. Even Joe Krasowski came out of his shell and displayed a bit of his former enthusiasm. Since Jed had been dropped, Joe had attended practice regularly, had merged his play into that of the team and had done everything expected of him. But he had been moodily silent, speaking only when necessary, and never so much as acknowledging by word or act the pres-

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ence of Ward Jackson. The others he treated with a sort of cold reserve, but Ward he ignored entirely.

Just before the varsity lined up for signal drill on Friday, Ward found himself standing beside the other boy. Impulsively he turned and looked directly into Joe's sullen eyes.

"Joe, old scout," he said frankly, "why not forget it, and be friends again?"

But his team mate, apparently not seeing the outstretched hand, only stared back blankly.

"I'd rather not be friends with a squealer," he answered shortly.

Ward turned away, not because he was afraid of Joe, but because he knew that a personal clash could do nothing but hurt the team.

But in spite of Joe's hostility, the practice went smoothly; and the next afternoon, when the squad started for Milltown in five hired cars, they had every hope of winning. But the game was the first contest away from home and the hardest they had yet faced; and they knew they must be at their best to win. Ward hoped that the school would be present in large numbers.

They dressed in a barren barn near the Milltown field, two or three of them showing an inclination to grumble over the unattractiveness of their surroundings.

"What do they think we are, a lot of horses?" Joe Krasowski asked.

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"They'll think that, maybe, when we start running through them," Jim Andrews answered easily. "Especially, Ward; he's a regular old truck horse."

Joe, frowning, relapsed into silence, while the others chatted nervously in a futile attempt to make believe they were not nervous. When finally they reached the field, however, they were mostly themselves again, eager to match their own strength against that of the Milltown eleven.

A roar from the visiting stand greeted them, and as the varsity swept by in a brief signal drill, Ward glanced curiously at the shifting mass of his school-mates. Here and there he saw a boy or a girl from Wintonville; not so very many, to be sure, but enough to convince him that the mass meeting on Friday afternoon had not been without results. Grinning happily, he hugged the ball in muscled arms and charged exultantly into an imaginary line. The crisis, he felt, had passed; in another month the spirit of Hillsdale would absorb the Wintonville group into itself.

When the whistle blew, Ward caught the kick-off joyfully and plowed straight down the center of the field for a clean fifty yards. On the second play, he tossed a long forward pass to Joe Krasowski, and Joe dashed over the line for a touchdown. It was easier than even the most ardent Hillsdale supporter had hoped for, and the stands roared their approval. Milltown, dazed by the unexpectedness of the score,

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elected to receive; and their quarterback, over-anxious, fumbled the ball. Joe Krasowski, scooping it from the ground, dodged two grasping tacklers and wormed his way twenty yards for another six points. Ward kicked the goal, and the score stood fourteen to nothing in the first three minutes of play.

But after that, Milltown settled down, and the game resolved itself into a grueling battle between two teams of approximately equal strength. Hillsdale, safely in the lead, played purely on the defensive for the remainder of the period, calling for a punt on the first down, conserving their strength and waiting patiently for a break which might give them another chance to strike. But no break came; the teams fought evenly through the first quarter and through the second. But when the whistle blew for the intermission, the Hillsdale players had the ball on the twenty-yard line and another touchdown was imminent.

In the middle of the third period, however, something happened which changed completely the aspect of the game. Stretch Magens, catching a forward pass, wheeled and started down the field. The Milltown fullback crashed into him and bore him to the ground. When Stretch tried to get up again, his leg gave way under him and he sank down in a huddled heap.

“Time!” Bill called.

Coach Merritt, with the consent of the referee, ran

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out upon the field, examined Stretch's ankle with skilled fingers.

"A sprain," he announced crisply. "He's through."

Ward and big Jim Andrews carried Stretch, protesting, to the sidelines; and "Midget" Cairns, first-string substitute, went in. But Midget, they all knew, was only a mediocre player at best; and the Milltown quarterback, trying him out, found that they were able to skirt his end for steady gains. Their attack swung to the right, swept Midget aside and continued sweepingly until Ward Jackson or another of the secondary defense halted them. But gradually, Hillsdale fell back, until when the last quarter started, the goalposts loomed over them. But Milltown, not to be denied, smashed between tackle and end for the required distance; and on the next play, her fullback dove over the last white line for a touchdown.

Hillsdale, however, made it a point to keep possession of the ball for the remainder of the game, satisfied to keep the home team from scoring. And when, after a seemingly endless interval, the whistle blew signifying the end of the game, they sighed in infinite relief and were glad to call it a day.

But they knew that if Stretch Magens could not get back again for the coming games, their chances of a county championship were poor indeed. For Hillsdale was a small school, with few capable substitutes;

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and already Midget Cairns had proved himself unequal to the test.

They found Stretch lying on his back upon a splintered bench in the dressing room.

"How goes it?" Bill asked anxiously.

"A doctor's been here," Stretch answered. "Says maybe I'll be back again in a couple of weeks."

"You'll have to get back," Bill told him. "We almost lost out there, after you left."

But it was evident, after a few days, that Stretch would be in no condition to play against Jamesburg on the following Saturday. The only ray of hope in the whole situation lay in the fact that Jamesburg was not a county school and that the result would have no bearing whatever on the championship.

"Probably," Bill Barrett said, when Stretch limped down to the locker room on Thursday afternoon, "you'll be able to get in the Valley Brook game for a little while. But even if you don't, you'll surely be right again by the time we meet Winston."

But Ned Conrad, whose father was a doctor, shook his head doubtfully.

"You can't tell about a sprain," he declared. "It's just possible that Stretch will be out for the rest of the season."

Joe Krasowski, listening quietly from his place at one end of the room, said nothing; but his eyes were thoughtful, and after a time he nodded grimly, as if he had just made an important decision. On Friday,

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when the varsity players were preparing for signal drill, Joe brought his brother Jed down to the locker room with him.

The others looked up curiously, with just a touch of apprehension, and Coach Merritt nodded impassively.

"Jed's got a suggestion to make about the game to-morrow," Joe announced. "He's ready to go in at end if you want him to."

Captain Bill Barrett glanced questioningly at the Coach, but the older man was silent.

"Jed's been dropped from the team," Bill answered finally.

"But I'm willing to call it quits, if you fellows are," Jed put in eagerly.

Bill wished that Mr. Merritt would say something, but evidently the older man had decided to let the team captain solve the problem himself. Bill smiled uncertainly, wondering what he ought to do. There was no denying the fact that the team needed Jed; Midget Cairns had shown little improvement, and his position was the one vulnerable spot in the Hillsdale defense. If Midget played against Jamesburg and the visiting quarterback discovered his weakness, there was no telling what might happen. Bill cherished a secret ambition to lead his team through a season of successive victories; and he felt, if Jed Krasowski came back again, that that ambition could

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be realized. But Jed had given his pledge to obey the rules, and had then broken his word.

Bill cleared his throat huskily, and glanced appealingly at Ward Jackson. But Ward kept still.

"If you're willing to apologize for what you did," the captain said finally, "and promise to support the Honor System for the rest of the season, we might consider it."

"I'm not promising anything," Jed answered sullenly, "but I'm willing to help out if you want me to."

"And you won't apologize?"

"What good would that do?" Jed's eyes were defiant. "You know as well as any of us," he continued, "that with Cairns at right end, Jamesburg is likely to beat us. I'm offering as a Hillsdale man to save Hillsdale from defeat. If that doesn't mean more to you than a lot of fool rules and promises, then you deserve to be beaten."

Suddenly, Bill's hesitation left him.

"There are worse things than being beaten," he said quietly. "And we're going to stick to our rules."

"You mean, then, that you won't let me play?"

"That's what I mean."

Jed's deep-set eyes glowed somberly. He waited indecisively for a moment before his lips curled contemptuously.

"I've given you your chance," he said shortly. "Now I'm through—for good."

When he had gone tramping down the corridor,

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the other players stirred restlessly and resumed their dressing. Coach Merritt, turning to the worried captain, laid a casual hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You're right, Bill," he said quietly, "there are worse things than being beaten. And one of them is the losing of our self-respect."

Joe Krasowski looked over at him wonderingly, his heavy face puzzled. But no one mentioned the incident again.

Nevertheless, they found it hard the next day to watch the powerful Jamesburg eleven sweep around the right end of their line for long and consistent gains. Somewhere in the stands, they knew, Jed Krasowski was watching; but the knowledge only served to make them play the harder. Their best, however, proved to be not quite good enough. With either Stretch or Jed in the line-up, they would have won; but, although the tearful Midget Cairns gave all that he had, the handicap was too big for them to overcome, and they went down to honorable defeat by the score of 13 to 6.

In the locker room after the game, however, they made no excuses, dressing quietly, with occasional comments upon certain details of play. It was hard to lose, of course, doubly hard in view of the circumstances; but no one complained.

"There are three more games," Bill Barrett said once, "and Stretch will be back next week."

The others, nodding grimly, drew on their over-

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coats and left the room, singly or in small groups. Ward, waiting until they had gone, found a sheet of paper in his locker, and using one of the benches as a prop, carefully traced out another motto to be added to the one already on the wall. Smiling wistfully, he tacked it up and stepped back to gauge its effect. Somehow, the sight of it gave him renewed courage:

WINNING OR LOSING, WE MUST PLAY
THE GAME

CHAPTER XVII

SPIRIT

THE school accepted defeat according to the code Mr. Merritt had taught them; and, strangely, even the Wintonville pupils had little to say. Jed Krasowski had attempted to make capital out of the Jamesburg game, but he had been seen smoking openly in front of the building before morning assembly; and whatever effect his words might have had was counterbalanced by the brief speech which the school principal made in the auditorium.

It was a speech which had to do with the relative value of an honorable defeat and a questionable victory; and in conclusion, Mr. Merritt quoted the new motto about playing the game, which had been recently posted in the locker room. They sang "Old Hillsdale High" before filing out to classes, and Ward noticed that even Joe Krasowski joined lustily in the swelling chorus.

He was frankly puzzled about Joe. The star end, in spite of his reticence, fought hard for the team; a grim figure on the gridiron, efficient, tireless, alert. He shared with Ward the pinnacle of stardom; and in spite of Joe's personal animosity, they worked

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together well. Ward told himself stanchly, even in the face of discouraging conditions, that sooner or later, Joe would come around. Men could not fight together as they were doing without mutual respect.

He was not worried greatly about Joe's promise to "get back at him." Ward felt fully able to take care of himself; his sturdy body was well-knit, his muscles hard. His only concern was that possibly Joe, in order to settle his personal score, might somehow injure the team.

There was nothing he could do, however, except await developments. Stretch Magens' limp had gone, and every afternoon he reported for practice, following the team in its scrimmage work, mastering the new formations. The squad settled down determinedly to wipe out the Jamesburg defeat; under the able direction of Coach Merritt, they ran eagerly through long signal drills, specializing in the open game, with their most effective play a double forward pass, Jackson to Krasowski. Their early training in the fundamentals left them free to center their attention upon the finer points of the game; there was a fascination about the practice sessions which swept away all hint of monotony.

In order to strengthen the team's one vulnerable spot, Ward was shifted to defensive end, Chubby Betts drawn back to play roving center. The new combination worked well, and the spasmodic gains of the second team came to a sudden stop.

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"We'll try out the new line-up against Valley Brook," the Coach declared on Friday afternoon. "They don't seem to be especially strong, and the longer we keep Stretch out, the better he will be for the Winston game."

The new combination worked even better than they expected. Valley Brook proved to be heavy but slow, and their plunging backs could make little impression on the Hillsdale line. When they turned to the ends, Ward Jackson and Joe Krasowski forced them back with ludicrous ease, until their quarterback, sensing the futility of further attempts at wide runs, resorted to the open game. But here, too, Hillsdale frustrated their most desperate efforts. Time after time, Doc Foulds caught soaring punts from the visiting full-back, squirmed precious yards through clutching arms, and set his own offensive machine in crashing sorties down the field. The score, when the final whistle blew, was 34 to 0 in favor of Hillsdale.

Prospects for the county championship brightened considerably after that. Of the five games already played, Hillsdale had won four, and only an accident had deprived them of the fifth. It was the greatest season that the school had enjoyed in many years; and the fact that two Wintonville boys, Joe Krasowski and Fritzinger, were doing their full share toward each victory served to close the rift which had once threatened to divide the school, to mold into greater

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strength that unity of purpose which is the basis of all school spirit.

On the Tuesday following the Valley Brook game, the entire Wintonville group arranged for their buses to arrive an hour later than usual and marched with the other students for cheering practice on the field. And not once in the hour that followed did they give other than the Hillsdale cheers. Ward knew then that gradually, although perhaps unconsciously, they had absorbed the spirit of Hillsdale.

Remembering his own cynical attitude at the beginning of the term, he was conscious of an increasing sense of shame at the things he had said and thought. The Wintonville crowd, he told himself, even though they did not wear stiff collars and silk shirts, were just as staunchly loyal as any of the original Hillsdale group. Ward was glad that they had come; contact with them, he felt, was a fine thing for himself and his schoolmates. He remembered suddenly what Mr. Merritt had said: "It isn't a man's clothes, but the stuff he has in him, that counts."

After practice that day, the team lingered in the locker room, although Joe Krasowski and the other Wintonville players were forced to leave early in order to catch their trolley home.

"We'll have to hand it to those fellows," Jim Andrews said after they had left. "Only two of them have a chance for their letters, but the other ten come here every day just to work on the scrubs."

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"That," Mr. Merritt told them, "is the highest type of school spirit. It isn't any fun to take a beating every day, and stick at it."

"We ought to give a dinner to the scrubs at the end of the season," Ward suggested.

"It's the least we can do," Jim agreed.

"I think," the Coach remarked, after a pause, "that we'll give Stretch a chance against Somerset. His leg seems to be strong enough now."

"It's as good as ever," Stretch declared eagerly. "And I sure would like to play again."

"With Stretch in," the team captain ventured, "we ought to beat Somerset without much trouble."

They nodded eagerly.

"And after that," Ward said, "the big game with Winston!"

On Saturday, Bill's prophecy proved to be correct. Somerset came to Hillsdale with a large crowd of rooters who evidently had unbounded confidence in their team. But the smoothness and power of the Hillsdale attack was more than the visiting eleven had counted upon; and although they gave ground grudgingly, three times they stood in the shadow of the goalposts and watched helplessly while Ward Jackson plunged through the center of their line for the touchdowns which meant victory. Then, with the Somerset game safely tucked away, the Hillsdale team turned its attention to the Winston game.

Tension settled upon the team and, to slightly less

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degree, upon the school. The weather turned cold; and on Monday, snow fell, making outside practice impracticable. But the Coach called the squad together in the locker room, where he gave them a blackboard talk, explaining in detail the formations to be used against Winston, pointing out the exact position of every man in every play. Darkness settled over the building, but still the Coach talked. Some one snapped on the light, Fritz Fritzinger stirred restlessly in his place, and the Coach's voice droned on. When finally he stopped, Ward glanced at his watch and noticed with surprise that it was almost six o'clock.

Outside, the snow continued, whipped against the window panes by a rising wind. Joe Krasowski, drawing on his overcoat without comment, prepared to leave.

"Probably," Bill Barrett told him, "the trolleys aren't running. You oughtn't to go home to-night, Joe."

"Have to sleep somewhere," the other boy mumbled.

"I'd be glad," Ward put in unexpectedly, "to have you come home with me. We've got plenty of room."

The others waited curiously, while Joe's suspicious glance searched Ward Jackson's face.

"It would be better for you to stay in Hillsdale," Mr. Merritt urged.

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But Joe, after a moment of hesitation, shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, speaking directly to Ward, "but I can't accept any invitation from you."

The other boy colored, but said nothing; and Mr. Merritt, speaking authoritatively, broke the rather awkward silence which followed.

"Fritz can go home with Ward," he announced, "and I'll take Joe along with me." At Joe's swiftly worded protest, he held up his hand. "It would be foolhardy to try to reach Wintonville in this storm," he said shortly. "Come on!"

The storm lashed against them as they emerged from the building, but they leaned their bodies sturdily to the wind and plowed through three inches of unmarked snow.

"If this keeps up," Fritzinger panted, "we'll all have to use snowshoes on Saturday."

The prospect worried Ward, as it did the other members of the team. Throughout the evening, while the two boys studied the next day's lessons before a roaring grate fire, the storm continued; and when they awoke on Tuesday morning, a blanket of snow met their inquiring gaze.

"Unless it rains or melts pretty quick," Ward said, "it looks as if the game will be off, Fritz."

But the other boy refused to be discouraged.

"There are four days yet," he answered. "And almost anything might happen by then."

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But Mr. Merritt, evidently, was not satisfied with waiting for things to happen.

"I have just been looking at the football field," he announced at morning assembly, "and it is covered with about five inches of snow. But the team needs practice, and it needs a victory on Saturday; so this afternoon, the football squad is going to turn into a snow shoveling gang, and we're going to do our level best to clear the snow from the gridiron."

He smiled into their wondering eyes, and some one started to clap. When the applause had died down, the principal spoke again.

"If any member of the school wants to help," he continued, "we'd be glad to have him. All boys who care to join the shoveling gang this afternoon are requested to bring shovels with them when they return from lunch. Classes, of course, will be held as usual throughout the day."

He raised his hand for dismissal, but suddenly Fred Burchan, one of the Wintonville boys, stood up in his place.

"If any of the fellows have two shovels," he announced, "I wish they would bring them to school. Probably some of the Wintonville crowd would like to help. It's our team, too, you know."

In the volume of applause which greeted the announcement, Ward Jackson pounded his hands together until his palms hurt.

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"Some spirit!" he said wonderingly. "Some spirit!"

At three o'clock that afternoon, one hundred and four boys, eight of them from Wintonville, joined the team on the Hillsdale Oval. And two hours later, the gridiron lay bare to the slanting rays of the setting sun.

"That," Mr. Merritt said, when the job was finished, "is the best afternoon's work the school has ever done."

"And in the face of such spirit," Bill Barrett answered, "the team can't do anything else but win on Saturday."

They waited around for a few minutes; and then, because it was growing late, they walked slowly toward the two entrances to the field. In one group were Ward Jackson, Bill Barrett and others of the boys who lived in the uptown section of Hillsdale; in the other group the fellows from Wintonville and the Hillsdale students who lived downtown, across the railroad tracks.

"It looks now—" Ward began.

But he did not finish his sentence, for a snowball, skillfully thrown, landed with a loud smack on the back of his head and trickled beneath the collar of his sweater. Wheeling, Ward discovered Jim Andrews, twenty yards or so away, grinning challengingly.

"Some shot!" Stretch Magens remarked.

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Stooping down, Ward scooped a handful of snow from the ground, and returned Jim's compliment. A moment later, the Great Snow Fight, destined to take its place among Hillsdale's most cherished traditions, was in full swing.

The two sides were almost equally divided; and the fifty or more boys at each end of the field proceeded to engage in joyous battle at long range. Joe Krasowski, slightly in advance of the Downtowners, assumed at once the position of leadership; and because Joe could throw with the speed of a bullet, the others were content to accept him as their captain.

Ward, gathering his own forces about him, outlined a plan of campaign.

"We'll drop back gradually," he said, "until we come to the big pile of snow on the running track. Then the smaller fellows can supply us with ammunition, and the rest of us can do the shooting. Let's go!"

At the first sign of retreat on the part of the Uptown section, Joe Krasowski ordered a charge; but so accurate was the aim of Ward and his followers that Joe could make no appreciable advance; and after a few minutes of desperate battling, he ordered a halt. Stretch Magens, reveling in the conflict, called out jestingly:

"Come ahead! Don't let us keep you."

"We're coming, all right!" Joe answered.

But for a long half hour nothing happened, except

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an occasional sortie on the part of the Downtowners and a brief but desperate battle of two small groups near the goalposts.

"It looks very much," Ward said to Bill, "as if we'll all have to stay here till dark, and we won't accomplish anything at that."

"How about a truce?" Bill suggested.

"It will have to come from them first."

At one side of the field, Stretch Magens was engaged in personal contest with a dozen or more of the smaller boys of the opposing side. For some reason or other, they had picked Stretch out as their particular target, and Stretch had accepted the challenge. He whipped snowballs across the intervening space with machinelike precision, scoring hit after hit; but he was outnumbered so heavily that he was able only to hold his own.

Meanwhile the two main armies continued their battle at long range. Ward, holding his place on top of a massive heap of snow, directed operations in his most military manner; Bill Barrett and the others rallied around him loyally, and the fight waged on, with much laughter on either side and no trace of bitterness. But in spite of their best efforts, the affair promised to draw out interminably.

Ward, glancing at his watch, found that it was after six o'clock.

"What we've got to do," he said to Bill Barrett, "is to make a charge ourselves. Tell each fellow to

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stack up with ammunition and be ready to advance.”

Nodding, Bill passed the word down the line; and when all was in readiness, Ward led his cohorts in a desperate charge. The Downtowners, taken by surprise, fell back slowly; and it looked for a moment as if they were going to be forced to admit defeat. But with their backs to the running track, Joe Krasowski rallied them; and although he could not regain the ground he had lost, he was able to halt the charge. Then, their positions reversed, both sides awaited further developments.

Stretch Magens, resuming his interrupted fight with the younger boys, concentrated on the task at hand and left the strategy to Ward. The Downtowners, well stocked with ammunition, began to send a rain of snowballs at their unprotected opponents. But neither side would give way an inch.

Long shadows, the harbinger of approaching darkness, settled across the field.

“Time for supper,” Mel Chalmers grumbled. “How long is this thing going to keep up, anyhow.”

As if in answer to his question, Joe Krasowski, who had been consulting with some of his followers, mounted a snowbank and waved a white handkerchief in token of a truce. Ward, accompanied by Bill Barrett and Stretch, went forward for conference.

“What’s the idea?” he asked. “Do you fellows surrender?”

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"Not so you'd notice it," Joe answered grimly. "But we've got a suggestion to make."

The others, ignoring the rules of warfare, crowded around the two leaders.

"What is it?" Ward inquired.

"We'll probably stay here all night if we keep this up," Joe explained. "And in order to settle the issue, I challenge *you* to a wrestling match."

Ward looked up doubtfully. He wasn't particularly anxious to meet Joe Krasowski in personal contest; and yet he knew that the challenge could not be ignored. It was fair enough; they were of equal weight and neither was a skillful wrestler.

"If I beat you," Joe continued, "my side wins; if you throw me, then your crowd are the winners. Are you game to try it?"

"Yes," Ward answered evenly, "I'm game."

"How about a referee?"

In the brief silence which followed, Mr. Merritt, who had been in the school building doing some work of his own, strolled across the field.

"I wonder if he'll act?" Joe asked.

The older man, after the circumstances had been explained, consented to officiate.

"The first fall wins," he announced, "and if after fifteen minutes neither man has been thrown, then I'll make the decision. You fellows willing?"

"Yes, sir," they both answered.

While Joe and Ward pulled off their mackinaws,

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the other waited eagerly. It was to be only a friendly bout, of course; and yet, there was hardly a boy present who did not know of Joe's promise to "get back."

"This is the chance he's been waiting for ever since Jed was kicked off the team," Stretch whispered to Bill Barrett. "I hope Ward can beat him."

"It will be pretty even, I imagine," Bill answered.

The two wrestlers, at the word of command from Mr. Merritt, circled slowly, watchful for an opening. They were both unskilled in the technique of the sport; but they were strong, in perfect condition, and apparently evenly matched.

Ward, tense and alert, waited for Joe Krasowski to make the first move. As far as he himself was concerned, he would rather have settled the snow fight in some other way; but now that he had accepted the challenge he had no intention of giving anything but his best.

"The thing to do," he thought, "is to get a good grip just as soon as I can and try to finish the bout right away."

Joe, however, had no intention of permitting him to secure a grip of any kind. So they continued to circle warily, until suddenly Joe leaped forward. Ward met him with outstretched hands; they swayed for a moment and then tumbled over in a heap, with Joe on top.

"That's the boy, Joe!" some one called.

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Flat on his chest, Ward felt the hands of his opponent slip beneath his neck.

"He's trying to get a full Nelson," Ward reflected. "It's up to me to start something."

But the weight of Joe's husky body bore down upon him, Joe's muscled arms held him in a viselike grip; and almost before he realized what had happened, he found himself being forced over on his side.

He exerted all his strength against the pressure, digging his feet into the hard ground, trying desperately to break the clutch of Joe's muscled fingers around his neck. But in spite of his efforts, he found himself powerless, his struggles in vain.

"You've got him now, Joe!"

It occurred to Ward, as he fought futilely to keep face downward, that by permitting Joe to win the wrestling match, he might possibly heal the breach that had sprung up between them. Joe might then consider his debt paid, and be willing to forget.

Just for an instant, Ward considered the advisability of admitting defeat without further struggle. His eyes were starting from their sockets, the cords of his neck stood out sharply. Defeat seemed inevitable.

"It really won't be quitting," he told himself. "I'm almost through, anyhow. And if I should let Joe win, then perhaps the team——"

But Stretch Magens' anxious voice broke in upon his thoughts.

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“Fight, Ward!” Stretch urged pleadingly. “Break that grip, old man!”

Somehow, the knowledge that Stretch, and a good many of the other fellows, were rooting for him to win, were expecting him to win, banished from Ward’s mind all recognition of defeat. He had gone into this thing with the idea of winning; he was, in a way, upholding the honor of his side—of the Uptowners. To admit defeat before defeat was a reality would be poor sportsmanship, would not be playing the game.

The pressure of Joe’s arms continued. Ward was almost on his back now, one shoulder touching, the other a bare two inches from the ground. Mr. Merritt was kneeling down, watching for both shoulders to touch.

“It’s all over,” Jim Andrews said.

Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, Ward heaved his body upward with all his strength. Joe Krasowski, counting victory already won, was caught unprepared. His grip loosened momentarily, and in that brief instant of respite, Ward heaved upward again, and Joe tumbled to one side.

Without a moment’s hesitation Ward was upon him. His hands locked beneath Joe’s chin, slipped around to the back of his neck. Joe’s mouth opened, and his face grew red with the strain.

“Hooray!” Stretch called. “You’ve got him now, old man.”

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Slowly but surely, Joe's shoulders approached the ground. Mr. Merritt bent down again, keenly alert. One shoulder touched. The other was forced downward, slowly but irresistibly. Joe's eyes seemed to pop from their sockets; he strained upward in an agony of effort.

Then, his other shoulder touched.

"Down!" Mr. Merritt announced.

The two boys climbed to their feet, their chests heaving. Stretch Magens pounded Ward upon the back, and beamed into his glowing eyes.

"You win, old man!"

Joe Krasowski waited for a moment, his own eyes somber. Then, unexpectedly, he stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Congratulations!" he said. "I thought I had you, but you fooled me."

"It was luck," Ward told him.

There was a moment of silence. Joe stood indecisively, as if he wanted to say something and did not know how to say it. Then, suddenly, he turned without further word and started toward the gate.

The others followed, but Ward waited where he was. Finally, he too turned and fell into step beside Bill Barrett.

"Joe's all right," he said huskily. "He knows how to take defeat without whining about it."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE FACE OF ODDS

WARD found himself wondering on the way to school the next morning just how the snow fight and its resultant wrestling match would affect Joe Krasowski. Ward was glad that he had won, of course; and yet, he was just a bit doubtful of the wisdom of submitting Joe to the humiliation of defeat.

"It's just possible," he said to Bill Barrett, "that Joe will be so peeved about the thing that he won't want to work with me on Saturday. And in that case, we might just as well hand the game to Winston right now."

But Bill disagreed.

"It was Joe who suggested the wrestling match," he answered. "And if he got beaten, he has no one but himself to blame. He didn't expect you to *let* him win, did he?"

"I don't imagine so."

"And he was man enough to congratulate you at the end," Bill continued. "I don't think you have any need to worry about Joe."

The Wintonville crowd had already reached the school when Ward and Bill arrived. The Krasowski

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boys, together with a number of the football squad, were sitting on the front steps of the building; and although there was the hint of a sneer on Jed's lips, Joe nodded easily and without apparent bitterness.

"If it keeps up as cold as this," Jim Andrews remarked, "probably Winston will want to cancel the game."

"We won't let them," Bill answered.

But his eyes were dubious. He was plainly worried about the unseasonable weather; it was more like January than November, and if the Winston coach decided to call off the contest, he would be well within his rights.

"We might substitute some coasting and skating races," Mel Chalmers suggested dryly.

"Nope!" Bill said. "It's football or nothing."

The loud ringing of the school bell summoned them to classes, and they filed slowly inside the building. In the corridor, Mr. Merritt greeted them smilingly.

"Practice this afternoon," he announced.

There could be no scrimmage, of course, on account of the frozen condition of the gridiron; but the first team ran through signal drill for a solid hour, perfecting their formations and spending the greater part of the time in the development of an open style of play.

"Our best chance to win," Mr. Merritt explained, "is by means of forward passes. Winston will outweigh us and will try to score mainly through line

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plunges. We'll have to depend chiefly on Ward and Joe. How's it going, you fellows?"

"All right," Ward answered.

But Joe only nodded grimly, his face impassive.

Ward, watching him, was conscious of growing doubt. Joe had been surly for so long now that the team was accustomed to his moodiness; but there was just a chance that Joe, in some crisis, might permit his anger to get the better of him and do something which would injure the chances of victory. And in that case——

Ward's lips shut grimly, and during a halt in practice he walked over to where Joe Krasowski was standing.

"How are you feeling after the big battle?" he asked pleasantly.

Joe looked up almost resentfully.

"You mean our little scrap yesterday?"

"Yes."

"I guess I'll get over it all right."

"No hard feelings, is there?"

The semblance of a smile played about the other boy's lips.

"No," he answered shortly.

At a word from Coach Merritt, they shifted into kick formation, and the practice continued.

They expected at any time to hear from the rival school; and on Wednesday afternoon the Winston manager appeared unexpectedly in the locker room,

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just as the Hillsdale team was about to go out for practice.

“Down home,” he said, in reply to Bill Barrett’s eager question, “the football field is covered with snow. I don’t see how we can possibly play on Saturday.”

Bill grinned into his somber eyes.

“Come over to the window,” he suggested, “and I’ll show you something.”

At the sight of the cleared field, with high mounds of snow piled upon the running track, the visitor’s jaw dropped in frank amazement.

“What do you know about that?” he asked. “How in the world did you get it done?”

“The school did it,” Bill told him proudly. “And the field’s there, if you care to play on Saturday.”

But the Winston manager shook his head doubtfully.

“I’ll have to go home,” he said, “and ask the coach about it.”

“Will you let us know to-morrow?”

“Yes.”

“If you decide to play,” Bill told him, “we’ll have the stands shoveled off even cleaner than the field.”

At nine o’clock the next morning, Winston telephoned that they would be glad to play the game on the Hillsdale Oval.

Mr. Merritt, announcing their decision, called for volunteers to help clear the stands.

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“Now that we’ve started this thing,” he announced, “it lies with us to finish it. How many of you will volunteer to do some more work on the field?”

Every boy in the school stood up, Jed Krasowski included; and the principal nodded in satisfaction.

“Whether we win or lose,” he said, “we at least have the finest school spirit in the county. And in many ways that is more to be desired than victory.”

But it would take more than spirit, they knew, to win the game with Winston. The rival team had had the best season in its history; its players were experienced, heavy, and slightly older than their opponents. Moreover, their splendid record had given them a confidence which would not admit even the possibility of defeat.

Ward Jackson, shoveling crusted snow from the wooden stands, weighed the chances of Hillsdale in the coming contest and decided that the game would be a grueling battle, with weight and experience on one side, and skill and spirit on the other.

“One single break may mean victory or defeat,” he told himself. “But if we fight hard enough, there won’t be any stopping us.”

On the tier above him, Joe Krasowski worked silently, with grim concentration on the task at hand. Other fellows, to whom the coming contest was, after all, nothing more than a football game, shoveled leisurely, stopping occasionally to swing gloved hands across their chests, commenting audibly about the

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weather, joking with one another, looking upon the whole affair in the nature of a picnic.

"If you fellows don't win after all the work we've done," one of them said to Bill Barrett, "we'll greet you with a chorus of hisses on Monday morning."

"You needn't worry about us winning," Bill answered easily. "That's already been decided."

By five o'clock, the stands had been scraped clean; and the workers, led by Bill Barrett, formed five abreast on the running track and marched triumphantly around the field. At the main entrance, the cheer leader called for a yell, and they gave it in thunderous volume:

Rah, rah, rah!

Rah, rah, rah!

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Team, team, team!

"Great stuff!" Bill declared. "Last practice tomorrow, men, and then—the game."

An atmosphere of tense excitement, of eager expectancy, hovered over the school on Friday morning. The members of the team did their best in classes, but they made rather a poor job of it. Even Ward, generally a good student, found his mind wandering; and in Senior English, he could not for the life of him remember who had written "We Are Seven." He was immensely relieved when, at two-thirty, they filed into the auditorium for general assembly.

The spirit of the school had never been quite so

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strong as on that afternoon. There was no reason to urge them to cheer, for they gave each succeeding yell with unstinted enthusiasm; and when Bill Barrett spoke, predicting victory, they all stood up in their places and sang the Alma Mater song—"Dear Old Hillsdale."

When they had finished, Mr. Merritt made a brief address, warning them against overconfidence, paying tribute to the Winston team, suggesting that defeat, so long as they had done their best, was in no way a tragedy.

"But whether we win or whether we lose," he concluded, "this thing I know: Every boy and every girl in school will be behind the team, our loyalty unquestioned, our faith unshaken. And the team itself will be in the game from the first whistle until the last."

Only the varsity was required to report at the field; and while the scrubs stood on the sideline and watched critically, the first-string players ran briefly through formations. Shortly after four o'clock, Mr. Merritt called a halt.

"That ends the work for the year," he said, "except, of course, the game itself. I have taught you all that I know, and you have worked hard and absorbed most of the teachings. Whatever happens to-morrow will depend upon yourselves, upon your ability to stand the gaff and come through in the face of your biggest test." He paused for a moment and smiled

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into their somber eyes. "And now, fellows," he suggested, "how about a long yell for the scrubs?"

They took their time in dressing; it was early yet and there was no need to hurry.

"Winston, I understand," Jim Andrews remarked, "has been practicing in a cleared space in front of the school. But we've had a whole field to work on, and we've got an advantage there."

"If it keeps as cold as this," Joe Krasowski said, "we'll run rings around them. They haven't much of a defense for the open game."

"Unless," Mel Chalmers put in, "we freeze to death before the game begins."

"Dog-gone this weather, anyhow!"

"We'll report here at the school at one-thirty," Mr. Merritt announced. "And remember, I want every man here on time."

"You can count on us," Joe told him.

Ward Jackson found some of his doubts fading. Whatever else might be said of Joe Krasowski, there had as yet been no reason to question his loyalty to the team.

"If only he'd drop his grouch against me," Ward told himself, "everything would be fine."

But Joe left a few minutes later, with only a brief nod to the others; and Ward, glancing through the window, noticed that Jed joined him outside the building.

"Let's get on," Bill Barrett suggested.

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They went to the "movies" in the evening, the team meeting at Ward's house and walking downtown in a body. Before the picture began, some one produced a copy of the Hillsdale *Record* and read aloud a story about the game.

"It looks like a toss-up," the sporting editor had written, "with a slight advantage for Hillsdale. In Joe Krasowski and Ward Jackson the local school has two players of exceptional ability. A good deal will depend upon the way they work together to-morrow."

There was more to the story; but Ward did not listen. Always, it seemed, he and Joe Krasowski were bracketed together. But Joe had promised to "get back at him," to pay him, in some way or other, for the imaginary wrong which had been done his brother.

"Now, more than ever, we ought to be friends," Ward reflected. "But we're not, and—and I wonder how it's going to come out, after all."

When they left the theater, they found that the weather had unexpectedly turned warm. The sky was overcast, and there was a hint of rain in the air.

"What do you know about that?" Bill Barrett said disgustedly. "Supposing it should rain to-morrow?"

"We'll play that football game," Mel Chalmers told him, "if we have to do it in a cyclone."

But it was rather a discouraged team which tumbled into bed that night; and on Saturday morning,

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as soon as he awoke, Ward rushed over to the window and looked out.

Fortunately, the clouds were gone, but a real thaw had set in, and the gutters were heavy with melting snow. Bill Barrett, dropping around after breakfast, shook his head dubiously.

"Here goes the old ball game," he said. "The field will be like a duck pond."

"Even if it is," Ward answered, "we can play the game."

"Yes, but the advantage will be all with Winston. Our speed won't do any good in the mud, and their weight will help them out a whole lot."

But Ward refused to be discouraged.

"If we can't win by forward passing," he said, "we'll beat them at their own game."

Later, when Stretch Magens joined them, they walked out to the field, where their worst fears were realized. The gridiron was already a mass of mud, wholly unsuited to an open style of play. Shallow pools of water collected near the running track, the wooden stands were wet, even the newly marked chalk-lines were soggy and gray.

"We sure are out of luck," Stretch announced unhappily. "Just when everything was going so well, too."

Mr. Merritt, who had seen them through a window of his office in the school, joined them and smiled into their somber faces.

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"More like baseball weather than anything else," he said.

"It's going to make it hard for us," Bill told him.

"Yes." The Coach spoke quietly. "We'll be under a big handicap."

"We might just as well hand Winston the game on a platter," Stretch grumbled.

"No, not that." The older man regarded them steadily. "It would have been much better for us," he continued, "if the ground had remained hard. But this team of ours, I think, is the kind that fights all the harder against odds—and I want you to show me this afternoon that I'm right."

There was something in the way he spoke which caused the three boys before him to forget their discouragement, which imbued them with new courage.

Ward Jackson's eyes glittered.

"We'll show you," he answered steadily. "We're going to win this game to-day or know the reason why."

"You bet we are," Bill agreed.

After Mr. Merritt had left them, they wandered downtown to the Y. M. C. A., where they found Mel Chalmers and some of the other players.

"This sure is the eel's eyebrows," Mel said. "The field must look like a lake."

"Worse than that," Ward told him. "We've just been up to look at it."

"It means we're through, I guess."

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“Not on your life.” Bill spoke seriously. “We had a word with Mr. Merritt, and he said that he expected the team to fight all the harder against odds.”

“We’ll fight all right.” Mel turned suddenly to the others. “What about it, fellows,” he asked, “are we going to win, or aren’t we?”

“We *are*,” Doc Foulds, the quarterback, answered.

“Let’s stop our grouching then,” Bill suggested. “And we’ll show them this afternoon that it takes more than mud to beat a *real* football team.”

CHAPTER XIX

JOE'S TO-MORROW

IN the locker room they dressed slowly, a sense of responsibility heavy upon them. Through the open windows they could see the high board fence surrounding the field, could glimpse the crowd of spectators at the main entrance, the long line of cars parked in front of the school.

"The whole town's turning out," Jim Andrews declared, "and Winston's brought a big delegation of their own. It's going to be some game, I'll tell the universe."

"Well, the county championship's at stake," Bill Barrett answered. His eyes grew wistful. "We sure do want that pennant for Hillsdale."

"And we're going to get it," Ward added.

They had recovered in a great measure their confidence. The mud-soaked field would, of course, be a big handicap; but they were natural fighters, and Mr. Merritt's calm acceptance of conditions had steadied them, had changed dismay and discouragement into renewed determination.

They expected him to make rather a long speech, but he said only a few words, reminding them of

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their obligation to the school, urging upon them the will to win. And when he had finished, Bill Barrett turned to his team with flashing eyes.

“Let’s go!” he said.

As they dashed out upon the chalk-marked field, the Hillsdale rooters leaped to their feet and gave them the “long locomotive.” The stands were filled to overflowing, and a double line of spectators crowded along the ropes at each end of the gridiron. Even the wet stands and the heavy, mud-choked field could not dampen their enthusiasm; they came with cushions, and newspapers, and heavy coats, and waited with tense expectancy for the whistle to blow.

Ward Jackson dug his leather cleats into the clinging turf and followed the interference in a sweeping dash outside of tackle. The thrill of the impending contest gripped him like a live thing; it was the last game that he would ever play for Hillsdale, and he wanted to win. The unfavorable conditions under which the game would be played only served to strengthen his determination, to fan the spark of his instinctive fighting spirit into glowing flame. He was eager for action, impatient of delay.

“Let’s get started,” he said; and, while Bill Barrett conferred with the Winston captain in the center of the field, he paced restlessly up and down the sidelines, his hands clenched at his sides, his knees trembling unaccountably. But after the whistle had blown, he knew that the trembling would stop.

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"Oh, you Ward!" some one called.

They lined up finally, Hillsdale in position to receive the kick-off. The whistle shrilled, and the curving ball dropped into the waiting arms of Bill Barrett. A visiting end crashed into him, halting him on the thirty-yard line. The stands roared.

Doc Foulds snapped out his signals.

"Six, eighteen, twenty-one!"

It was Ward through guard, and as the teams sprang into motion the fullback plunged forward, every muscle taut. Mel Chalmers opened a hole for him, and he followed the big lineman for a clean eight yards before the secondary defense stopped him.

"Hold that line!" some one rasped. "Watch Jackson!"

Grinning, Ward climbed to his feet. His knees were already wet, one arm caked its entire length with mud.

"Signals!"

Ned Conrad was halted without a gain; but on the next play Ward made it a first down. A cheer sounded from the Hillsdale stands, with his own name at the end; and he thrilled at the sound of it. The school was behind them, he told himself; they must not fail.

But they gained only three yards on the next two rushes; and, although on the third down Ward knifed his way through tackle for a five-yard advance, Doc

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Foulds decided to kick. It was too early in the game to wear his backfield out by futile rushes.

Ward, dropping back, knocked the mud from his cleats and held out his hands. The ball curved into them straight and true, he took a single step forward and sent a soaring punt booming down the field. When the Winston quarterback caught it, Joe Krasowski was waiting. It was the visitors' ball on their own thirty-yard line.

The Hillsdale defense drew together in compact formation, their knees resting on the soggy earth, their eyes watchful.

"Hold them!" Ward called. "Low on the line, men."

Jim Andrews stopped the ensuing play for a two-yard loss, but the heavy Winston backs only muttered harshly and sprang into a shift formation. On the next play they swept around end, brushed Stretch Magens aside, eluded Ward's desperate tackle and dashed down the field, with only Doc Foulds between them and a touchdown.

The single interferer remaining threw himself before the crouching Hillsdale quarterback, the man with the ball swerved and dodged clear of Doc's clutching fingers. Free, he sprinted ahead for a certain score. But on the two-yard line, Joe Krasowski crashed him to earth in a diving tackle.

"Fight, fight, fight!" the Hillsdale stands yelled entreatingly.

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Ward, his face streaked with grime, brought down his hand resoundingly upon the broad back of Chubby Betts.

"In there, you men!" he rasped. "Stop them! Push them back!"

In the shadow of their goal posts, the Hillsdale team fought like so many tigers. But a plunge through guard gained a precious two feet, a thrust outside of tackle earned another yard. It was third down, with the ball a scant four feet from the line.

"Hold them! Hold them!" Bill Barrett implored.

When the mass of players were untangled a moment later, the ball lay six inches from the goal. It was fourth down. The stands roared, and Winston settled herself for the final thrust.

The lines met, strained and pushed. The referee leaped into the heap of struggling players, dug for the ball and found it—a single inch over the cleat-torn chalk-mark.

"Touchdown!" he thundered; and pandemonium reigned in the Winston stands.

Joe Krasowski, tears of helpless anger in his eyes, leaned against the goal posts, his hand on Ward Jackson's shoulder.

"We'll get them," he grated sobbingly. "The game's young yet."

"We've *got* to," Ward answered, his own eyes gleaming.

Strangely, even in that moment of gripping tension,

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his mind turned, not to the tragedy which had just enveloped them, but to the boy beside him. He and Joe were fighting shoulder to shoulder in the one big cause, were playing together with the same end in view, the same gripping purpose. They were not enemies, Ward told himself wonderingly; in their heart of hearts they could not be anything but friends. Soldiers in the same cause—comrades!

“Block that kick, Joe,” he urged eagerly. “Block that kick!”

They lined up five yards from the goal, Ward slightly behind the crouching figures of his center trio. At the snap of the ball, Chubby Betts charged close to the ground, his broad back offering a foothold. Ward, dashing forward, using the Hillsdale center as a step, leaped clearly over the Winston defense, and landed on his feet before the kicker. The ascending ball struck him fairly in the chest and bounded to one side.

“Good work!” some one rasped; and a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder. Turning, Ward found Joe Krasowski beside him. Their eyes met and held in a look of sudden understanding. Comrades!

“We’ll receive,” Bill Barrett told the referee.

But the first period ended without further scoring, and throughout the second quarter the teams battled evenly. The ball became a mud-caked spheroid, slippery, elusive. Once, with but a minute to play, Joe Krasowski missed a forward pass which might have

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resulted in a touchdown, but no one blamed him. They had never played in such a sea of mud before.

Finally, the half ended, and the glaring letters on the scoreboard remained unchanged: Winston 6, Hillsdale 0.

They changed into clean jerseys during the intermission, while Coach Merritt walked quietly from one player to another, sponging the mud from their wet faces, offering an occasional suggestion, commending them on their fighting spirit.

"We've already passed the crisis," he said, when they were ready to go out again. "Nine out of ten teams would have gone to pieces after that one touchdown, but you men only fought the harder. That is the spirit that wins—and win we must." His keen eyes rested upon the mottoes posted on the wall. "Tackle low, and hit the line hard," he concluded. "And fight, men—for Hillsdale!"

Their reappearance was the signal for a long, booming cheer from the Hillsdale stands; a cheer of confidence, of loyalty, and of undaunted courage. And as the sound struck into his straining ears, Ward Jackson knew that the same cheer would rise again with undiminished strength at the end of the contest. It would make no difference whether they won or lost. *But they were not going to lose.*

The soggy ball lessened their effectiveness, however, made useless the open style of play which had been their biggest asset. Time and again during the

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third quarter, they sprang into open formation, but the mud-caked ball eluded the grasping fingers of their ends; the mud clung to their shoes and robbed them of their speed. The period ended with no further scoring.

In the brief conference during intermission, Ward assumed leadership of the team.

“Our open play isn’t working,” he announced grimly, “and we’ve got to beat Winston at her own game. Let’s hit their line, and hit it hard.”

It was Hillsdale’s ball near the center of the field, for after that one disastrous sweep around end, Winston had been unable to gain. On the first play, Ward plunged through center for five yards; they gave him the ball again, and he duplicated his feat. And in the ensuing five minutes, he forgot the roaring stands, forgot the mud which reached for him with gripping tentacles, forgot everything except that Winston was ahead, the grim necessity of fighting his way forward for the touchdown which might mean the victory.

“Give me the ball!” he rasped. “Give *me* the ball!”

Toward the end of the long march, queer lights danced before his shining eyes, his shoulder hurt, and his mind was a chaos of conflicting thoughts. But through it all one thing stood out clearly—somehow, whatever the effort, he must reach that last white line.

They gave the ball once to Bill Barrett, but Bill

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failed to gain and Ward turned to the Hillsdale quarterback almost ferociously.

"Give it to me!" he snapped.

When he arose from the next play, he staggered drunkenly, but out of the corner of his eye he saw the linesmen move forward and he knew he had made another first down.

"Keep it up!" Jim Andrews muttered. "We've only got five yards to go."

Ward made it in a single rush, plunging forward with a power that would not be denied, ripping his way clear of reaching arms, his lips parted, his head lowered like a charging bull. He did not know that he had made a touchdown until he stumbled against Bill Barrett and glimpsed the glory of it in the captain's shining face.

A minute later, his mind clearing momentarily, Ward kicked the goal. The figures on the scoreboard changed: Winston 6, Hillsdale 7.

Joe Krasowski hugged him bearlike, with muscular arms.

"Six minutes left," some one announced.

Six minutes! Winston, electing to receive the kick-off, fumbled the ball on the second down, and Joe Krasowski and a visiting end leaped forward. But Joe was first; he grasped the pigskin with clinging arms and held on grimly. The Winston player, unable to stop his momentum, crashed down upon Joe. The whistle blew.

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"Hillsdale's ball!"

Joe Krasowski climbed to his feet dazedly, staggered a step or two, and then tumbled in a heap upon the ground.

"Time out!" some one rasped.

Mr. Merritt ran across the field, bent over Joe and chafed his wrists with experienced hands.

"Water!"

The Coach wiped the grime from Joe's face, permitting some of the water to trickle down his neck. Joe sat up, glimpsed the anxious faces around him, and climbed to his feet.

"I'm all right now," he announced.

Mr. Merritt regarded him dubiously; and after a moment of hesitation, walked back to the sidelines. The whistle blew. It was Hillsdale's ball on Winston's ten-yard line.

There was no stopping them then.

"Right through for another touchdown!" Bill Barrett rasped.

Twice in succession Ward Jackson plunged into the center of the opposing line; and each time the Winston forwards fell back as if a battering ram had struck them. With four yards to go on the third down, Doc Foulds gave the ball to Ward again; and when finally the struggling, mud-soaked heap of almost unrecognizable players was unraveled, the referee threw his hands high above his head.

"Touchdown!"

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Thirty seconds later, Hillsdale added another point to the score. They led now, 14 to 6; there was less than five minutes to play, and only a miracle could rob them of victory.

Joyfully the Hillsdale players leaped to their places for the kick-off. Of all the team, Joe Krasowski alone seemed unaffected by the glory of those last two touchdowns. His face impassive, he walked slowly to his position at the end of the line, and waited indifferently.

"In the game, Joe, old man!" Bill Barrett called.

Turning, Joe gazed blankly at the Hillsdale captain, and nodded dazedly.

"That knock on the head has stunned him," Bill muttered. "I wonder——"

But the whistle blew just then, and Bill, at the first impact of Ward's boot against the pigskin, dashed desperately down the field. Mel Chalmers made the tackle, and the whistle blew. It was Winston's ball on her own thirty-yard line.

"Hold 'em!" Bill Barrett rasped. "Only two minutes more, men!"

On the first rush, the visiting team worked a triple pass which was good for twenty yards. They lined up again near the center of the field; and Joe Krasowski, crouching low, found himself wondering vaguely how many more hours the game was going to continue.

Since he had recovered the fumble for Hillsdale

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following the first touchdown, Joe had been in a semi-stupor, able to go through the motions of playing but realizing only vaguely what was happening upon the field. His head ached dully and his mind refused to function properly. The minutes stretched out endlessly; the cheering from the stands sounded as if from a great distance, and even Joe's fellow players were only vaguely familiar.

"I'd like to stop," he told himself, "but I can't do that. Now, if the game would only——"

Suddenly, in the midst of the lethargy which gripped him, he saw a man dashing toward him. It was a Winston player, he knew, and instinctively he braced himself for the contact. Leaping forward, he tackled low and hard. Curiously, the ball bounded to one side, and bounced along ludicrously. Joe, reaching for it, found it unexpectedly in his arms. He whirled once or twice dizzily, glimpsed two white goal posts looming against the blue of the sky, and made for them with all the power of his weary limbs.

He noted subconsciously that he was free, that no one was within fifteen yards of him. But he knew, too, that in his present weariness he could not run very fast, and that at any moment pursuit might overtake him. Grimly, with parted lips, he sprinted for the beckoning goal.

Footsteps sounded behind him, and he turned his throbbing head to find a Winston player running beside him. He braced himself for the tackle, but the

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other boy made no effort to stop him. Puzzled, Joe continued his dash, fighting down the nausea which threatened to overcome him. He could not understand why the Winston man did not make his tackle, and he shook his head helplessly in a futile attempt to solve the problem.

On the ten-yard line he staggered, recovered himself and fought his way forward. And then, unexpectedly, a figure hurtled itself at him, dragging him to the ground five yards from the goal. He waited a moment with his eyes closed, stunned by the force of the tackle; and when he opened them again, the grim face of Ward Jackson loomed above him.

A wave of uncontrollable anger engulfed him then, clearing his mind.

"What's the big idea?" he snapped.

But he knew, even as he spoke. Ward, who had already debarred his brother Jed from the team, was now robbing him of the honor of making a touchdown in the big game with Winston.

But Ward, curiously, only grinned into Joe's glowing eyes.

"You poor boob!" he muttered huskily. "You were running toward *the wrong goal!*"

"Gee!" Joe said.

And then darkness enveloped him.

They told him all about it later in the dressing room, after his mind had cleared and he had been stripped of his mud-soaked uniform.

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"If you had made it," the Coach explained, "the Winston player who was running alongside of you would have tackled you behind the goal line, and that would have been a safety, with two points more for them. But it wouldn't have made any difference, of course, for the game was already won."

"Not to the team maybe." Joe spoke slowly. "But if I had finished that run and had made a score for Winston, I'd have been the laughing stock of the whole town. It would have been the biggest joke of the season."

"But you were dazed, of course, after that knock on your head."

"Perhaps," Joe admitted, "but people wouldn't have remembered that." His eyes searched the circle of boys around him until they discovered Ward Jackson. "It was you," he said huskily, "who kept me from making a fool of myself."

"Any of the other fellows would have done the same thing," Ward answered. "I just happened to be nearby, and——"

"And you did it, just the same," Joe broke in, "even though you knew that I'd been laying for you all season and had promised to get back at you." As Ward attempted to interrupt, Joe held up his hand. "I'm not much on this thank-you stuff," he continued, "but I know a big thing when I see it, and that's what you did to-day. You showed me up for the rotter that I am."

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"No," Ward said, "you're not a rotter, Joe—just a fine football player and a real man. How about shaking on it?"

Their grips met, while the others looked on in silence. And as they stood there in the center of their smiling team mates, Ward's glance wandered over to the mottoes on the wall. It rested finally on the one for which he was seeking:

"Here at Hillsdale, we judge a man's to-morrow by his to-day, but never his to-day by his yesterday."

Turning, Ward grinned happily. Joe's to-morrow, he knew, was safe because of the one significant incident which had marked his to-day.

"If you haven't anything else to do," Ward said, "I'd like to have you come home to dinner with me."

"Sure!" Joe answered.

From the direction of the field drifted the sound of joyous singing.

"Listen!" Bill Barrett said.

With shining eyes, they waited until the last note had died away.

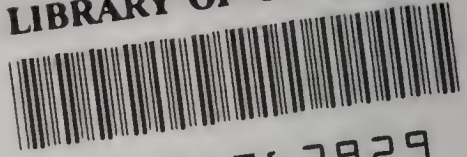
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